

## Duquesne University Duquesne Scholarship Collection

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

2011

# A Lesbian Parented Family's Acceptance and Experiences in Family, Social, and Educational Systems: A Qualitative Case Study

Sarah Dalton

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd>

---

### Recommended Citation

Dalton, S. (2011). A Lesbian Parented Family's Acceptance and Experiences in Family, Social, and Educational Systems: A Qualitative Case Study (Master's thesis, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/452>

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact [phillips@duq.edu](mailto:phillips@duq.edu).

A LESBIAN PARENTED FAMILY'S ACCEPTANCE AND EXPERIENCES IN  
FAMILY, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: A QUALITATIVE CASE  
STUDY

A Thesis

Submitted to Duquesne University

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Science in Education

By

Sarah E. Dalton

December 2011

Copyright by  
Sarah E. Dalton

2011

A LESBIAN PARENTED FAMILY'S ACCEPTANCE AND EXPERIENCES IN  
FAMILY, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: A QUALITATIVE CASE  
STUDY

By

Sarah E. Dalton

Approved October 24, 2011

---

Dr. David Delmonico  
Professor of Counselor Education  
(Committee Chair)

---

Dr. William Casile  
Professor of Counselor Education  
(Committee Member)

## ABSTRACT

# A LESBIAN PARENTED FAMILY'S ACCEPTANCE AND EXPERIENCES IN FAMILY, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

By

Sarah E. Dalton

December 2011

Thesis supervised by Dr. David Delmonico

This single case study was created to investigate one lesbian parented family's experiences in family, social, and educational systems to gain perspective on their overall happiness. In depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with two lesbian parents currently raising three children. After data collection and analysis, the researcher constructed six findings based on the primary research questions. The study determined that regardless of minor discrimination in the systems, the parents and their children have positive experiences in their family, social, and educational systems. The parents also offered ideas about political and social changes that would improve their lives. Overall, the study determined that regardless of negative experiences based on their sexual orientation, the parents believe that all members of the family are happy and proud of their family unit.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract .....	iv
Chapter I: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Statement of Problem.....	2
1.2 Clarifying Significance of the Problem.....	4
1.3 Purpose of Study .....	5
1.4 Research Questions .....	5
1.5 Research Design .....	6
1.6 Research Objectives .....	6
1.7 Anticipated Limitations of the Study .....	7
Chapter II: Literature Review .....	8
2.1 Lesbian Families .....	8
Legal Limitations .....	11
Discrimination and Social Hardship .....	14
Psychological Health.....	17
Societal Interaction.....	19
Educational System .....	21
Implications for Counselors.....	24
2.2 Qualitative Research .....	26
Case Study Design .....	28
Interviews as Research Method .....	32
2.3 Chapter Summary .....	37

Chapter III: Methodology .....	38
3.1 Research Sample and Population.....	38
3.2 Conceptual Framework .....	41
3.3 Context .....	42
3.4 Overview of Procedures.....	43
3.5 Data Collection Methods.....	44
3.6 Interview Process.....	45
3.7 Data Analysis and Synthesis .....	47
3.8 Ethical Considerations .....	48
3.9 Limitations of the Study.....	49
3.10 Chapter Summary .....	50
Chapter IV: Presentation of Findings.....	51
4.1 Finding 1.....	53
4.2 Finding 2.....	57
4.3 Finding 3.....	62
4.4 Finding 4.....	64
4.5 Finding 5.....	68
4.6 Finding 6.....	74
4.7 Synthesis.....	78
4.8 Summary of Interpretation of Findings.....	80
Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	82
5.1 Conclusions .....	82
5.2 Researcher Reflections.....	84

5.3 Recommendations .....	85
Political and Legal Bodies .....	85
Social Network and Media .....	87
Educational Systems .....	88
Further Research .....	91
5.4 Implications for Counselors .....	93
References.....	96
Appendices.....	102
AA.1 Participant Consent.....	102
AB.1 Pre- Interview Questionnaire .....	107
AC.1 Semi Structured Interview Questions .....	109



## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Lesbian parented families are found throughout the United States and the world, however, there is little research about how these families function in various family, social, and educational systems (Weber, 2008). Creating a same-sex parented home can be extraordinarily difficult and include using methods of adoption, surrogacy, a sperm donor, and other unique family situations in order to have a child. However, the challenges of raising a child may be even harder to face than the process of creating a family.

In the United States, the most socially acceptable type of parents are married heterosexuals, and families that do not fall into this social norm are often treated differently (Lev, 2010). For lesbian parents, homophobia and blatant discrimination stemming from societal, religious, and political sources may cause them to hide their lesbian parented family from social acquaintances, school systems, and even from family members. Many people, even some within the lesbian community, question whether lesbian parents are able to provide a healthy and supportive environment for children within their home (Weber, 2008). The legal limitations on same-sex families in many states are another source of stress for gay and lesbian parents.

Legal support for same-sex parented families differs by state with only six states offering legal parenting rights to gay and lesbian parents equal to heterosexual parents. Without legal backing, same-sex couples must oftentimes battle against unclear laws in order to become parents (Patterson, 2009). Additionally, it is difficult for parents to provide family wide healthcare and insurance, especially if both parents are not legal guardians of the children. In many states, the lack of legal support of same sex parents

causes many families to feel discriminated against simply based on their family structure (Green, 2004).

Human service organizations, such as those facilitating adoptions and foster homes, are not immune to prejudices and discrimination towards same-sex parents. Some gay and lesbian parents experience discrimination within the adoption system based on their sexual orientation (Ross, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, Strike, 2008). With the legal system favoring traditional, heterosexual couples in adoptions, gay and lesbian parents are further handicapped in their ability to create a family (Barbaro & Confessore, 2011; Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004).

In society, lesbian parents experience discrimination and are treated unfairly for many different reasons. Inaccurate stereotypes about same-sex relationship may include lesbian individuals being seen as dysfunctional, overly sexual, unstable, and unhappy (Weber, 2008). Lesbian parents may also face societal scrutiny and pressure to raise children who are considered “normal.” Even lesbian couples that feel accepted into society are often intensely watched to make sure they raise children who fit into traditional gender and sexual orientation roles (Lev, 2010).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

In societal, religious, and political systems, the purpose, structure, and well being of same-sex parented families are oftentimes questioned because society favors traditional heterosexual parented families (Barbaro & Confessore, 2011; Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004). Blatant discrimination towards gay and lesbian individuals and their families may have mental health implications such as depression, poor self-image, emotional problems, and many more (Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004). Anti-

gay groups and traditional family activists publish documents degrading gay and lesbian families and encouraging societal discrimination against them.

Powerful social, religious, and political groups who do not support gay and lesbian families, such as the Family Research Council, do not support research explaining how gay and lesbian families are formed, how each person experiences their family, the outcome of the children, and the commitment of the partners to one another and their family (Birkey, 2011). Rather than educate others about lesbian families, some groups continue to publish dangerous, and at times, untrue information about gay and lesbian families that leads to further discrimination (Lev, 2010).

The Family Research Council, an organization supporting only the heterosexual family structure, publishes brochures reporting research results that support their belief that in order to be emotionally stable, children must have a mother and a father (Birkey, 2011). The group urges citizens to support only traditional marriage roles and not to support gay marriage in states where gay marriage laws are pending. Battling against a majority culture, children of gay and lesbian parents may experience discrimination that impacts their mental health (Weber, 2008).

Research has shown that children who experience discrimination and are socially marginalized have an overall lower well being and less enjoyable life (Weber, 2008). In addition, feeling marginalized can lower a child's self esteem and cause behavioral issues (Bos & Gartrell, 2010). However, when children are surrounded by positive social support and loving parents, they develop in the same way as children from heterosexual parents (APA, 2004).

While research is available that supports same-sex parents as healthy and reliable parents (Bos & Gartrell, 2010), some helping professionals such as counselors and social workers may not be educated on how to work with gay and lesbian families (Adams, Jaques, & May, 2008). School, community, adoption, and family counselors need to be aware of gay and lesbian family issues to serve as advocates for their clients. Without informed helping professionals who advocate for and work with gay and lesbian individuals and families, psychological distress brought on by discrimination will continue.

## **1.2 Clarifying the Significance of the Problem**

Every family is impacted by the societal and political systems that surround it. Traditional heterosexual families are legally supported by marriage, child custody and adoption laws that support their union as the most common type of family. Therefore, social systems tend to support families led by heterosexual parents as the most acceptable type of family. Being in the minority, gay and lesbian parented families may experience discrimination and become social outcasts because their family structure differs from the heterosexual majority. Furthermore, these unique families face legal boundaries because gay families are not legally recognized in most states (Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004).

Regardless of social or political support, children of gay and lesbian parents have few differences in terms of mental health, life outcome, and thoughts about sexual and gender identity from children raised in heterosexual parented families (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Lev, 2010; Weber, 2008; Rohner, 1999). However, gay and lesbian parented families are often hidden from society and therefore, the individuals in these families may

have more negative life experiences, including discrimination, to overcome (Bos & Gartrell, 2010).

Given the lack of published research about gay and lesbian parented families, there is a need for quality research about lesbian parented family systems. Research is needed to describe the intricacies of gay and lesbian parented families, to examine how the families are created, the issues the family experiences as the children grow and mature, how the family is treated in various social systems, and overall, on the family's mental health and well-being.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate one lesbian parented family and their experiences and acceptance into family, social, and educational systems. Through the use of face-to-face interviews, data was collected to discover how disclosing a lesbian parented family structure to family members, friends of the parents and children, and members of the school system affects the parent and the parent's perception of their child's experiences in these systems.

This study will help contribute to our understanding of the many facets of lesbian couples who are also primary caregivers to children. This understanding has many applications in social and political arenas as gay couples are striving to gain equality on a variety of fronts. The data gathered will help tell the story and reveal the perceptions of one lesbian couple actively parenting at least one child.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How do lesbian parents experience their family, social, and children's educational system on a daily and long term basis?

2. How do lesbian parents perceive their child's experience in family, social, and educational systems on a daily and long term basis?
3. What political, social, or systematic changes, if any, do lesbian parents believe need to be made for optimal positive experiences in social, family, educational systems?

### **1.5 Research Design**

The research conducted for the purpose of this study included three face-to-face interviews with one lesbian couple. The parents selected for this research are currently parenting one or more children together. Data was collected through one pre-interview questionnaire, three semi-structured interviews, follow up questions, and additional clarifying narratives and information volunteered by the parents. All of the information was audio recorded and then transcribed into an interview script. From the script, a family case study was compiled focusing on the family's experiences in family, social, and educational systems. The researcher analyzed themes presented in the data that described the experience of a lesbian parented family.

### **1.6 Research Objectives**

The principal objectives of the present study are to:

1. Describe one lesbian parented family's experiences in family, social, and education system.
2. Investigate family, social, and educational systems in need of improvement for further acceptance of lesbian parented families.

3. Create a qualitative case study that can be used to educate helping professionals as well as school administrators, leaders, and teachers about lesbian parented families.

### **1.7 Anticipated Limitations of the Study**

Prior to conducting any face-to-face interviews, it was understood that the qualitative nature of the research method would limit the generalizability of the findings. Family systems are dynamic and unique and therefore, the experiences of the subjects used in the study may or may not relate to any other lesbian family. Furthermore, the subjects used in the study may have withheld, skewed, or neglected information about their family, which may change the overall perception of the case study. Finally, case studies are subject to interpretation, and therefore, the presented information may be misunderstood or misinterpreted by the primary researcher upon data analysis.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

The following literature review is separated into two main categories; same sex parented families and qualitative research methods. The first section of the literature review presents the current literature regarding lesbian and gay parents and expected outcomes for children raised in same-sex parented homes. The formation of same-sex families, legal limitations, discrimination and social hardship of these families are discussed. The majority of all available research says children raised in lesbian and gay-parented homes have similar outcomes to children raised by heterosexual parents. In addition, literature explaining how same-sex families experience their family, societal, and educational systems is presented. This section of the literature review concludes with implications for counselors, which highlights the need for helping professional's education and activism regarding same-sex family equality.

The second section of the literature review discusses challenges and benefits of qualitative research methods such as case studies. While many research strategies can be used to create a case study, semi-structured interviews are primarily discussed. When researched and written ethically, completely, and without biases, a case study offers valuable information about the subject, which, in some cases, can be generalized to others. The paramount goal for this section of the literature review is to present published articles validating qualitative research and case study methods as beneficial forms of data collection for the counseling profession.

### **2.1 Lesbian Parented Families**

Lesbian parents have the unique challenge of composing their family through a variety of techniques and strategies. Single parent adoptions, second parent adoption,



couple adoption, artificial fertilization, surrogacy, and a previous heterosexual relationship are all ways in which a child can enter a same-sex parented family. While surrogacy and insemination may be very costly options, adoptions are often plagued by heterosexism and injustices throughout many adoption agencies. The tribulations many lesbian parents experience in order to have a child are as unique as each parent themselves.

Families headed by lesbian parents are formed through a variety of methods and face many challenges. Even within the lesbian and gay community, opinions about parenting are undecided (Weber, 2008). This may be because children enter same sex parented families in a variety of ways and society is unsure how to view these family units. In heterosexual relationships, the methods used to have a child in a homosexual relationship are very rare. However, lesbian parents must use these methods as the norm to have a child. The difference between obtaining a child in a same-sex family as opposed to a heterosexual-headed family causes many people to question the formation of these modern families (Weber, 2008).

“Lesbian and queer mothers navigating the adoption system: The impacts on mental health” investigates adoption standards of same-sex parents with limited social support post-adoption in Canada. Interviews of seven lesbian and queer adoptive parents focused on “barriers to accessing health and social services” to show the difficulty of same-sex adoptions (Ross, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, Strike, 2008, p. 254).

In the study, narrative qualitative research was conducted by asking participants to tell their adoption story from beginning to end. Five of the seven interviews explained the adoption process as emotional and they were unable to predict what would happen.

Much of the uncertainty centered on discrimination, which turned into problems with physical and mental health (Ross, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, Strike, 2008).

Though Canadian adoption laws differ from those in the United States, the study is important because in international adoption cases, homophobia was explicit. The homophobia in the study caused some couples to hide their sexual identity until after their child was adopted for fear their sexual orientation would negatively affect their chances of becoming parents. The trepidation surrounding negativity and prejudices within the adoption process should be considered when agencies work with same-sex adoptive parents (Ross, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, Strike, 2008).

An essential part of Ross, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, and Strike's study (2008) is the discrimination that same-sex adoptive parents face when trying to add a child into their family. If gay and lesbian parents cannot adopt children because of their sexual orientation, heterosexism and homophobia continue to be played out in society. Furthermore, the impact of this discrimination on the parent and children's mental health will permeate through the family.

Lesbian individuals and couples hoping to adopt a child often experience difficulty because adoption agencies favor heterosexual couples or individuals. While adoption laws in the United States vary based on the state, the overriding social favoritism is for heterosexual parents. In addition to laws, the narrow definition of a family continues to lessen a lesbian parent's chances of adopting children. Without a clear definition of the many types of family units and legal acceptance for many types of families, lesbian parent adoptions will continue to be difficult in many states (Ryan, Pearlmuter, & Groza, 2004)

**Legal Limitations.** Same-sex civil marriage, civil unions, and domestic partnerships are a new social construct in the United States and throughout the world. Universally, the legal boundaries for such relationships are vague, undefined, and rarely grant legal status to same-sex relationships. In 2008, only five countries throughout the world legally recognized same-sex relationships. These countries benefit from a well defined, organized, and recognized family unit for all types of families, including same-sex parented homes. The legal and social construct for same-sex unions in other countries continues to collectively evolve (Weber, 2008).

In many states, the lack of legal support for same-sex couples and families impacts their well-being and life satisfaction. Without legal support, lesbian couples cannot benefit from her partner's healthcare plan, participate in heterosexual couple legal rights, and their sense of social citizenship is greatly diminished (Green, 2004). The lack of legal support for lesbian relationships negatively impacts the couple's feelings of support, happiness, and ability to have a family.

Charlotte Patterson's literature review, "Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents: Psychology, Law, and Policy" (2009), analyzes important legal considerations for same-sex parents. It includes discussion of same-sex marriage, divorce, adoption, and foster care and the discrimination that these families experience in their everyday life. A crucial argument when discussing same-sex families surrounds the legal rights same-sex families receive and how legal policies should govern them. Lesbian and gay individuals and couples are limited in their abilities to become foster or adoptive parents in many states after identifying their sexual orientation. Parents who conceived their children

through previously heterosexual relationships can lose visitation and custody rights after affirming their lesbian or gay identities (Patterson, 2009).

In 2009, at the time Patterson's article was written, five states- Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont- had legal recognition of same-sex marriages. In addition, New York and Rhode Island did not allow same-sex marriages but recognized marriages conducted in other jurisdictions (Patterson, 2009). In June 2011, New York changed its laws and became the sixth state to legalize same-sex marriages. (Barbaro & Confessore, 2011).

States recognizing same-sex civil unions in 2009 were California, New Jersey, and New Hampshire, which offer the same legal rights as heterosexual marriages. Oregon, Washington, and the District of Columbia offered domestic partnerships for same-sex couples, which offer most if not all rights of marriage (Patterson, 2009). Legally, some progress in allowing or recognizing same-sex marriages has been made since 1990, when no state recognized same-sex marriages.

Patterson addresses child custody and visitation by gay and lesbian parents after dissolution of heterosexual relationships in various states. For example, in Massachusetts and California, sexual orientation is considered irrelevant to the parent's custody of their children. Other states consider parental visitation if it will impact the well being of the child. In a Virginia Supreme Court case (*Bottoms v. Bottoms*, 1995), the mother's lesbian sexual orientation was said to be an undesirable parenting characteristic when considering if she would have custody of her children.

In other custody cases, parental rights and visitation was questioned or even denied because of sexual orientation. An example is *Burgess v. Burgess*, where the

Indiana Supreme Court said the father's sexual orientation raised suspicion of an "aberrant lifestyle" (*Burgess v. Burgess*, 1990). These cases show that while legal progress has been made for gay and lesbian parents, in some states, the parent's sexual orientation may have a negative impact on their custody.

In regard to adoption and foster care, same-sex parents are not able to adopt as a couple in some states. Same-sex couples are only explicitly banned from adopting children together in the state of Florida and other state have different rulings about same-sex parents and adoption. For example, in Michigan, couples that were married in another state are not allowed to adopt together and in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Utah, unmarried couples cannot adopt (Patterson, 2009). However, second parent adoptions are allowed in some states, which give one parent the ability to adopt their partner's child and then receive all the same legal responsibilities as a parent. While states such as California, New York, and Massachusetts have had openly lesbian and gay parent adoptions, the legal changes needed for same-sex parented families is great (Patterson, 2009).

Lesbian parents experience many struggles in order to be the legal parents of a child. While some states question gay or lesbian parents' lifestyle, others are concerned with the welfare of the children in lesbian and gay homes. Few states recognize lesbian and gay couples to be two legal parents of a child. The legal barriers lesbian and gay parents face affect the family in multiple ways. However, if a lesbian and gay parented family has a child, the discrimination and social hardship they may experience presents other challenges.

**Discrimination and Social Hardship.** Discrimination towards lesbian individuals and couples generally stems from ignorance, fear, or misinformation about people different from oneself. Common misconceptions about lesbian and gay people is that they are overly sexual, do not have stable relationships, deviate from traditional family values, and are a threat to the typical heterosexual family unit. However, research shows that lesbian and gay relationships counteract these stereotypes and prove to be positive examples of a stable family. This shift in perception is allowing society to slowly recognize the need for a new lesbian and gay paradigm in our culture.

Stigmas surrounding same sex relationships have negatively impacted lesbian and gay legal and social rights in the United States and throughout the world. Assumptions about same-sex relationships include being dysfunctional, unhappy, unstable, and requiring different needs than heterosexual relationships (Weber, 2008). However, the American Psychological Association (2005) says lesbian and gay couples have satisfying and healthy relationships, are markedly committed to one another, and require the same personal fulfillment as heterosexual couples. The foremost doctrine on psychological health's support of same sex relationships supports sexual minority relationships both socially and legally.

Henry Bos and Nanette Gartrell (2010) created a study about children of lesbian mothers and the homophobia they experienced throughout life. In "Adolescents of the USA National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Can Family Characteristics Counteract the Negative Effects of Stigmatization?" 84 lesbian-headed families were followed over the course of six years to track the children with the research method of

questionnaires. The questions focused on family connection, compatibility, and communication and how it relates to instances of homophobia and stigmatization.

Bos and Gartrell hypothesized that the greater positive family connection and conversations about homophobia a family has, the less the children would be influenced by stigmatization. In the study the adolescents were questioned about family connection, compatibility, and communication within in the family and how they internalized negative stigmas. The results of the study showed two of the 32 adolescents experienced homophobic stigmatization and therefore had problem behavior such as internalizing and externalizing feelings. In addition, the higher level of family compatibility, the “lower rating of internalizing, externalizing, and totally problem behavior” reported by the child (Bos & Gartrell, 2010, p.570).

Significant results from Bos and Gartrell’s study showed children who were treated unfairly because of their parent’s sexual orientation were negatively impacted in their psychological well-being. However, children who reported close relationships with their parents were not negatively affected by stigmatization. A key conclusion from the research is that family acceptance and positive communication greatly affected the children’s home atmosphere and feeling of societal approval. Studies such as Bos and Gartrell’s highlight a key area of the psychology and counseling professions to be expanded with further research.

Continued research about lesbian parent communication and the psychological health of children could offer more therapeutic strategies for lesbian parented family therapeutic interventions. Lesbian parented families will continue to be a part of society

and further education about how children of gay parents adjust in all areas of their lives will benefit all families and their overall well being (Bos & Gartell, 2010).

Arlene Istar Lev also researched the importance of discrimination on a family headed by lesbian or gay parents. Lev's study focused on how gender identity and sexual orientation of LGBTQ-headed families can be targeted by society and experience discrimination. The research emphasized the pressure on LGBTQ parents to raise heterosexual and gender-normative children rather than children who question their gender, are homosexual, or have psychological issues. Great pressure is put on the parents and children of LGBTQ families for the children to be within "normal" societal expectations (Lev, 2010).

Lev's study discussed the transition from traditional families to the frequently found "alternative" family (Lev, 2010). Alternative families can include multicultural members of the family, adopted children, same-sex parents, and children conceived through modern medical procedures. With the changing structure of families, Lev's study focused on defining appropriate gender behaviors in children within alternative families.

LGBTQ parents experience many struggles including how to balance their world-views with how to be "normal" parents. Having children within same-sex families is often achieved through donor sperm, insemination, surrogacy, as well as adoption. While lesbian parents can have children, they may face opposing gender opinions. Lesbians are sometimes seen as a threat to societal norms because they are "militant, anti-male feminists" (Lev, 2010, p. 277). Contrastingly, lesbians can also be extremely caring and



nurturing, unlikely to cause harm to their child. Gay men have similar role dilemmas including being seen as overly sexually active and a threat to children's safety.

One of the greatest threats to heteronormativity is how parental gender relates to the children's gender and sexual orientation. Lev found that when a child differs from gender or relationship norms, the parents sometimes fear they will be blamed for their child's personal expression. The cognitive dissonance between what the child believes and society accepts can cause distress in areas of education, self-esteem, and peer social interactions (Lev, 2010).

Overall, Arlene Lev's study was a call for more research in the area of family structure, child gender identity, and sexual orientation of children in same-sex families. The narratives provided children's experiences, which were often that of happy and well-adjusted children. However, more research about LGBTQ parents and how they raise their children is needed to continue spreading awareness about healthy children, regardless of their sexuality or gender roles (Lev, 2010).

Lesbian parents struggle not only to raise children to be productive and well-adjusted members of society, but also how to combat possible social stereotypes and discrimination when raising their children. The pressure to raise gender typical, heterosexual children is a constant in same-sex parent's lives. In addition to satisfying societal pressures, lesbian and gay parents continuously attempt to show healthy, warm, and supportive parenting techniques to be accepted by others.

**Psychological Health.** The pressure to raise socially accepted children is great, but parents also strive to live an authentic life. In doing so, they compose their family as an expression of their own genuine self. As an indicator of well-being and personal

potential, positive family structures provide a sense of purpose to the parent. When a family is socially supported, follows a united purpose, and is able to overcome life challenges, family members are typically mentally healthy (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Contrastingly, families that experience discrimination or low social acceptance may have psychological distress (Weber, 2008).

Same sex couples that experience discrimination, separation from the social majority, and are socially marginalized, may have lower overall well being (Weber, 2008). The American Psychological Association (2004) and the American Psychiatric Association (2005) both favor family rights for sexual minorities and say there is a harmful and negative impact on mental health for individuals, couples, and families who have experienced discrimination.

Parenting a child appears to have the most positive impact on life satisfaction for the parent. Therefore, individuals who feel socially supported in their parenting and family structure, have more positive mental health (Weber, 2008). Parent satisfaction typically allows children to be raised in the most positive and warm environment possible. Additionally, parents with a warm and accepting parenting style are more effective in socializing their children and helping them to feel more accepted (Rohner, 1999).

Lesbian parents face many issues in raising their children including discrimination, marginalization, and fear about how their children will be perceived. When children experience homophobic stigmatization, their self-esteem is affected and often their behavior declines (Bos & Gartrell, 2010). However, a few ways to counteract

intolerance include interaction with other children of same-sex parents, attending a school supportive of tolerance and diversity, and open communication in the family.

Furthermore, parents who perceive themselves as active members in the lesbian and gay community help raise children who feel comfortable with their family structure (Bos & Van Balen, 2008). This open dialogue helps children to feel supported by their family and those around them. The current literature shows sexual minorities to be fit for parenting and family life. In addition, the literature supports lesbian couples and their need for all the legal, social, and political rights to completely participate in society (Irvine, 2005). Recognition of lesbian relationships will positively impact the parent's mental health, and therefore, increase the likelihood that children in these families are supported in a warm and nurturing environment.

**Societal Interaction.** A stereotype about children of same sex parents is that they will display delinquent behaviors because of their family structure. This assumption questions the motivations and parenting styles of the parents. However, the following research shows children of lesbian parents to have similar societal experiences to children raised by heterosexual parents.

Jennifer Wainright and Charlotte Patterson's study "Delinquency, Victimization, and Substance Use Among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents" (2006) studied children of lesbian parents and the amount of delinquent behavior, substance abuse, and parental relationships among the children. 44 adolescents of female same-sex couples and 44 adolescents of different-sex couples were interviewed and surveyed.

The results showed moderate cigarette and alcohol use, low levels of alcohol abuse, few reports of sexual activity in combination with drug or alcohol use, and

minimal amounts of delinquent behavior. This study revealed no significant differences between children raised by lesbian parents as those by heterosexual parents (Wainright & Patterson, 2006).

Wainright and Patterson's study (2006) revealed that regardless of family structure, children with a close parental relationship were less likely to report risky behaviors. Overall, it shows that children who are supported, have open communication with their parents, and have a close parent and child relationship are less likely to have problems with delinquency or substance abuse.

Available research shows few differences between heterosexual and lesbian parents. Jennifer Adams, Jodi Jaques, and Kathleen May agree and say the main impact on non-traditional families is society. Some parents struggle with being open about their sexuality for fear of discrimination, ostracism, and possible rejection. Counselors, helping professionals, and society need to recognize that heterosexuality is not the only acceptable form of sexual identification (Adams, Jaques, & May, 2008).

In continuing support of same-sex parenting, Ellen Perrin's "Technical Report: Coparent or Second-Parent Adoption by Same-Sex Parents" (2002) says lesbian mothers raise children who appear within normal ranges for self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and parenting stress. They are committed to the children, their maternal roles, and helping their children resolve conflict, feel supported in society, and cope with problems. According to Perrin (2002), children with lesbian mothers do not differ from children raised by heterosexual parents in areas of personality, peer relationships, self-esteem, behavioral difficulties, academic success, or quality of family relationships. It is important for society to appreciate the similarities of same-sex headed households to

more traditional family structures. Increased understanding will eventually create greater acceptance of diverse family units.

To understand the complexity of being open about an individual, couple, or family's sexual orientation, society must refute many negative and untrue stereotypes. Non-traditional families such as lesbian families need social recognition. In addition, politics, institutions, and personal opinions, beliefs, and attitudes need to be aware of the challenges of lesbian families (Adams, Jaques, & May, 2008).

**Educational System.** Same-sex parented families may experience discrimination in society as a whole, but it also exists on an organizational level. Lesbian parents must work with the educational systems to make sure their children are safe, respected, and understood while in school. Lucy Rimalower and Caren Caty's 2009 article, "The mamas and the papas: the invisible diversity of families with same-sex parents in the United States," investigates current literature about how gay parents and families find their way through society.

Available literature shows that families with same-sex parents struggle with disclosing their family structure in the child's schools system. When a child of same-sex parents enters the school system, many schools do not know how to support the family. Lack of education, sensitivity, and understanding often stems from fear, homophobia, heterosexism, and general misunderstanding about the family structure. Rimalower and Caty (2009) address why children begin school feeling proud of their family structure and then may keep it a secret due to negativity, discrimination, and disapproval from others.

While there are more same-sex couples raising children now compared to previous times, homophobia and heterosexism impact the school system more than

racism or sexism. This may be because the gay rights movement is not a part of mainstream culture and school administrations do not know how to work non traditional families. In addition, homophobic bullying is a significant concern for children of same-sex families and therefore these children may hide their family structure. Bullying can include “harassment, ostracism, stigmatization, taunting, and rejection from [the children’s] peers and schoolmates and the assumption that they are of the same sexual orientation as their parents” (Rimalower & Caty, 2009, p. 25).

Rimalower and Caty’s 2009 study concluded that schools need more education surrounding bullying in schools so children can acquire positive coping strategies leading to high self-esteem. Discussions about heterosexism throughout childhood will help children of same-sex parents become educated on the proper vocabulary surrounding their family structure. Overall, there are “no significant differences” between traditional and same-sex headed families that would cause impairment to the children (p. 27). Rather, schools need to implement a curriculum that includes same-sex families and teaches children about various peer family structures. With the help of counselors, administrators, and educators, children of same-sex parented families can adjust well to their school system and be properly supported (Rimalower & Caty, 2009).

“Psychosocial Adjustment, School Outcomes, and Romantic Partnerships of Adolescents With Same-Sex Parents” looks at same-sex parents and opposite-sex parents and how their children adjust in school and social environments. The study also investigated the children’s sexual orientation when raised in both types of households. The study determined that adolescents functioned well and their adjustment was based on family interactions rather than family type (Wainright, Russell, Patterson, 2004). In

addition, the study found romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior was not associated with parent sexual orientation or family type. Rather, a child's adjustment and success in social and school groups was proven to be best when the children had a close relationship with their parents (Wainright, Russell, Patterson, 2004).

In order to conduct this research, qualified schools were given a questionnaire and from the data gathered, a smaller sample of students were randomly selected. In home interviews were conducted on 44 adolescents with same-sex parents from varying ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses. Areas of psychosocial adjustment included symptoms of depression and self-esteem. In addition, school success was questioned and included grade point average, school connectedness, and trouble in school. Questions about romantic relationships, attractions, and behaviors were also included. Finally, questions about parental warmth toward the child, adolescents' perception of inclusion in their neighborhood, adolescents' perceived autonomy, care from adults, and their overall relationship with their child were asked (Wainright, Russell, Patterson, 2004).

The adolescents reported "positive psychosocial outcomes" and low levels of depressive symptoms (Wainright, Russell, Patterson, 2004). Adolescents also said that feeling connected to their school lowered instances of trouble in school. Overall, the study showed "no differences in adolescents' psychosocial adjustment" and children of same-sex parents were more connected to their school (p. 1887). There were no differences in adolescent reports of "family processes, including parental warmth, care from others, personal autonomy, or neighborhood integration" (p. 1888) Lastly, the study found no difference between types of families and adolescent sexual experience, orientation, or romantic relationships.

Wainright, Russell, and Patterson's study (2004) showed that the higher level of perceived care the adolescent felt from their parents, the more connected the child is in school and the higher their confidence at home and in school. The completion of the study found "no differences" in same-sex families compared to opposite-sex families in the areas of personal adjustment, school adjustment, and romantic relationships (p. 1887). Furthermore, the study found "no justification for limitations on child custody or visitation" by same-sex parents (p. 1897). Children raised by same-sex parents are well adjusted in their school and social environments and show no differences compared to children raised by heterosexual parents (Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

From the available literature, there is a call for additional diversity and acceptance training in the educational systems. School administrators, teachers, and other student personnel need education on how to deal with peer bullying, negative stereotypes, and making the students feel comfortable in school. While warm and caring parents may support their children at home, they still are subjected to possibly hurtful or negative influences while at school. With further education and implementation of no tolerance policies for bullying, all students can feel they fit in and are able to excel at school.

**Implications for Counselors.** The previous literature review discusses studies about same-sex parented families and how they interact with their own family structure, society, the legal system, and schools. The research is consistent in saying that children who are cared for, experience acceptance in their family and at school, and have open communication with their parents are generally happy and well adjusted. In addition, children of same-sex parents are not disadvantaged in terms of life satisfaction, connection to their parents, and overall life success than children from traditional family



structures. However, lesbian parent families may experience discrimination and other hardships leading to distress. In these situations, counselors need to understand the importance of their counseling with same-sex families.

Adams, Jaques, and May (2008) suggest counselors working with lesbian parents be aware of their own beliefs and biases. In addition, counselors should be intolerant of antigay actions and language to best advocate for the gay community. Counselors must use ethical practices such as engaging in training, education, and experience with lesbian and gay parents to best advocate for their clients (Adams, Jaques, & May, 2008).

Working as ethical helping professionals, counselors can positively impact society and the overall welfare of lesbian and gay individuals and parents.

Counselors, social workers, and other helping professionals also impact same-sex families in terms of adoption recommendations, placements, and potential parenting matches (Ryan, Pearlmuter, & Groza, 2004). Therefore, it is ethical that individuals in the counseling profession base their professional practices from research showing there to be “no empirical evidence [demonstrating] that living with a gay or lesbian parent has any significant negative effects on children” (Ryan, Pearlmuter, & Groza, 2004, p. 87).

While research shows no difference between heterosexual and same sex parents, some adoption agencies do not support same sex parents. Supervisors following heterosexist norms, overall agency attitude, and being subject to ridicule may create an agency atmosphere void of same sex parent adoptions (Ryan, Pearlmuter, & Groza, 2004). In addition, unclear state laws about lesbian and gay adoptions may lead agencies to interpret the law in any manner of their choosing. This leads to inequality and discrimination towards lesbian and gay applicants.

With proper training, a supportive atmosphere, and clearly defined organizational policies, adoption and community agencies and all helping professionals can become more compassionate and ethical in their services for potential lesbian adoptive parents.

## **2.2 Qualitative Research**

Quantitative and qualitative research methods are often used to describe the type of data that each focuses on for the purpose of the study. A stereotypic understanding of these two types of research may be that quantitative studies focus only on numerical data and qualitative research is centered on interpretation. However, many qualitative studies include numerical data and quantitative studies can consist of interpretations. More importantly, the traditional view of the terms “quantitative” and “qualitative” is not about the data produced, rather, their differing underlying assumptions and beliefs (Willis, 2007).

While qualitative and quantitative schools of thought often appear to be opposing and mutually exclusive, Jaan Valsiner says quantitative research is actually a derivative of qualitative research methods. According to Valsiner (2000), both qualitative and quantitative data is subject to researcher subjectivity and improper representation. Just as interpretation can lead to research errors, so too can errors in quantitative methods.

Qualitative and quantitative theory and method phenomena are equally dynamic and need to be revealed within the evaluation of the data. Adequate knowledge cannot be obtained from research that is improperly represented. Furthermore, researchers needing qualitative or quantitative data must use the information that best represents what they are interested in (Valsiner, 2000).

Even when data is properly represented, researcher subjectivity is substantial. Valsiner says that all types of data are simply a representation of phenomena, and in order for it to be understood, will always involve some level of interpretation and subjectivity (Valsiner, 2000). This shows that both qualitative and quantitative data could potentially produce flawed results if the data is incorrectly interpreted. While traditional understandings of quantitative and qualitative research might label the two as competition, they both can be valuable forms of information and research.

Interpretivism is a subset of qualitative research, which is particularly helpful in examining human behavior (Willis, 2007). Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/2003) says humans do not experience the world as it is. Rather, humans interpret what they sense in the world. Kant's philosophy has inspired interpretivists who believe that humans' behavior is in keeping with their environment. In addition, humans are influenced by their perception of the environment. This means that to properly understand a person, we must understand what is happening around an individual and how they experience these events (Willis, 2007).

The nature of the counseling profession creates a distinct connection between the field and qualitative research methods such as case studies, narratives, and life histories. Counselor skills including observation, interviewing, listening, and interpretation are essential in the profession and are likewise used in qualitative research. Qualitative research allows the theory and interpretation to be ever evolving, similar to the counseling profession (Hanley-Maxwell, Hano, Skivington, 2007). However, qualitative research methods are rarely found in printed counseling journals (Berrios & Lucca, 2006).

The infrequent publication of qualitative studies does not mean they are secondary to quantitative methods. Rather, qualitative research has relevance in the counseling profession, it allows individuals to be followed intensely and over time, and it looks at an individual and the systems they experience everyday (Hanley-Maxwell, Hano, & Skivington, 2007). The benefits of qualitative studies are less understood and seen as more mysterious than quantitative studies (Hagner & Helm, 1994). Unease about the method causes it to be less widely used, however, when used correctly, the benefits are extremely important to the counseling profession.

To fully understand a human's life experience, research must include everything their world entails. This means what happens around them, how they interpret their surroundings, and the way in which they reveal patterns before, during, and after the data collection (Szymanski, 1993). One of the best ways to obtain such an all-encompassing human case study is through qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, and observations (Willis, 2007). With these methods, researchers are better able to understand how humans are experiencing life.

**Case Study.** A case study is a type of qualitative research used to contribute to the knowledge of an individual, group, or organization in addition to societies, politics, or related phenomena. Case studies are used throughout many areas of study including psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, and community planning. Case studies aim to illuminate decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented, and outcome of the decision (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, case studies observe the effect of events, cultural influences, and life decisions on individuals, groups, or systems. With this purpose, case studies are

frequently used in social sciences to help explain humans and overall social phenomenon (McGloin, 2008).

While case studies are frequently used, there are prejudices associated with this particular form of qualitative research. Case studies might be criticized for lack of rigor, not following a systematic procedure, and biased interpretation of the results (Yin, 2009). In addition, it is harder to scientifically generalize information gathered through case study research, however, much can be learned from a particular case (Enomoto & Bair, 2002). Robert Yin (2009) says case studies are generalizable to “theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p. 21) The goal of case studies is to expand theories that are not clearly evident and not to detail frequencies.

Case study research may be unfairly looked down upon is because in case study teaching, data is sometimes incorrectly used to prove a specific point not in keeping with the actual research (Garvin, 2003). It is less likely that quantitative research based on numbers will be altered, however, qualitative data can be manipulated to fit specific purposes. This negation of the research is to the fault of the teaching, not the research (Willis, 2007).

Though case studies are sometimes misused or misinterpreted, case studies are beneficial forms of research and can greatly benefit many fields of study. Case studies, and other forms of qualitative research are not only for exploratory purposes (Yin, 2003). Rather, they are used in the fields of psychology, sociology, political science, and social work and help to understand social phenomena (Gilgun, 1994). Case studies, as a research method, should not be thought of in a hierarchical nature compared to other

forms of research. Rather, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to properly explore, describe, and explain a research question (Yin, 2003).

Case study research is a specific investigative method, usually focusing on a few key research questions that the researcher deems important (Stake, 2003). While case studies are used in many fields of study, case studies involving social, human subjects are constructed purposefully, not randomly. Case studies are designed to explore a particular person, site, group, community, or system in a single unit or instance (Enomoto & Bair, 2002).

Often thought of purely as a type of qualitative research, case studies can include quantitative data (Yin, 2009). Regardless of the data gathered, case studies can be used in a variety of research areas and include many different focuses (Willis, 2007).

Appearing throughout research literature in many different forms, case studies can be particularistic, naturalistic, thick descriptive data, inductive, or heuristic studies in structure. Particularistic case studies focus on a small amount of data, for example, one person or a family. These types of studies use only a few participants to gather data (Willis, 2007).

Naturalistic studies are about people in real situations. The researcher observes the subject doing every day tasks and records how they react to the real-world situations. The benefit of a naturalistic study is that it gathers information based on how the individual experiences their world. A common form of naturalistic observation is through a subject interview (Hagner, 2010).

Thick descriptive data studies are comprised of participant observation, interviews, narratives, and other types of data including quantitative sources. Focusing

on the context of the data, inductive case studies create generalizations and educated guesses about the subjects from the information. Finally, heuristic studies help the reader understand the “phenomenon under study” by creating meaning or verifying previously stated information (Willis, 2007, p. 243).

The many types of case studies allow researchers to examine the subjects most in keeping with his or her research interests. In structure, case studies can consist of either a single or multiple case studies design. For example, Enomoto and Bair’s study “The Role of the School in the Assimilation of Immigrant Children” (1999) focused on a particular high school and how multi-ethnic children fit into a school population. The subject in this study is a group, the high school students. However, case studies can consist of only one subject such as Hebert and Beardsley’s study, “Jermaine: A Critical Case Study of a Gifted Black Child Living in Rural America” (2001). The difference between the two types of study is the subject that is being researched, an entire high school as compared to a single individual.

Unlike experimental designs, the researcher can enter into a case study without “predetermined hypotheses and goals” (Willis, 2007, p. 240). This is because case studies allow the researcher to gather information in a subject’s natural and social environments. Additionally, the researcher is able to adapt the data collection process in keeping with the subject in his or her natural environment. The flexibility of case study research helps gather valuable social science data, which does not need to be generalized to society as a whole. Rather, case study data offers an abundant understanding of the subject in the study (Willis, 2007).

**Interviews for a Case Study.** Case study data can include observations, structured or nonstructured interviews, analyses of documents, historical data, and quantitative data. However, the type of data collected may change as the study progresses. Interview research uses questions to gather stories and data from the subject (Willis, 2007). The data offered applies to the particular subject at that specific time. While it is hard to generalize one person's experiences to a larger group, it is almost always done. To successfully gather data that can later be generalized, a specific interview structure must be followed (Wengraf, 2001).

The researcher must first conduct face-to-face interviews for the purpose of constructing a model, or understanding, or an individual, construct, or reality. Secondly, the researcher tests this construct to see if the subject confirms or denies the presented construct with facts. Oftentimes, the researcher's job is to both create a construct and test it at the same time (Wengraf, 2001). Successful completion of these steps helps researchers gather data from the interview that can be used in a valid case study.

A strength of qualitative interview research is that the researcher gathers information helpful to understanding the human process of creating meaning (Daly, 2007). This means that not only is the data collected valuable because the subject said it, but also that it can be documented in a clear and understandable way. Being either open, semi-structured, or structured interviews, the researcher uses questions that best fit his or her analytic framework (Willis, 2007).

An unstructured or open-ended interview is comprised of general conversation or one general question in the desired area of interest (Daly, 2007). This type of interview allows the participant to talk about their experience in an open conversation. The



researcher's goal is to gather information and understand the subject's meanings, perspectives, and life experiences. A benefit to unstructured interview design is that the subject leads the researcher into areas he or she perceive as important. This further helps the researcher gather meaning about the subject's life (Daly, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews include general questions that can be modified throughout the interview process. The original research questions are usually derived from current literature on the subject, but as the researcher learns about the subject, the questions can change (Daly, 2007). However, even with a semi-structured interview, the researcher must be prepared with questions and be able to flexibly create new questions based on the subject's response. The preparation for a semi-structured interview should be just as intense as a structured interview (Wengraf, 2001). The main advantage is that the researcher can focus on key questions and serve as a reference point for the direction of the interview (Daly, 2007).

As opposed to the looser structure of open-ended or semi-structured interviews, the highly structured interview is rigid and is used when the researcher needs to gather specific information. The questions in this type of interview are open-ended or have fixed responses. Highly trained interviewers conduct the session and all of the participants are found through random sampling. An advantage to this type of interview is that the data gathered could be compared to the general population because of the way the participants were recruited. However, the intense structure of the questions may not allow the subjects to elaborate about essential information (Daly, 2007).

Depending on the structure of interview and the questions used, the information offered to the researcher will vary. The researcher's worldview is of paramount

importance in interview studies because in semi-structured and open interviews it heavily influences the data gathered (Willis, 2007). Regardless of the structure of the interview, the subject is greatly influenced by the researcher's questions and the interview itself (Mazeland & ten Have, 1996).

In structured interviews, the researcher gains the most beneficial data by not allowing his or her personal opinions to show. This would include agreeing or disagreeing with a particular answer. In addition, the researcher should not interpret the meaning of a question or offer his or her opinion on an answer (Fontana & Frey, 1994). However, in an interpretive approach, the researcher can do these things (Willis, 2007). The researcher must be very aware of his or her body language, voice inflection, and structure of the questions to hear the participants' life story, which will be construct the case study (Stake, 2003).

One of the best ways to gather the spoken as well as physical data from the participant is to conduct face-to-face interviews (Daly, 2007). An active, face-to-face interview is a type of story telling where the interview collects data about the subject's world (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). The interview setting allows the researcher to establish a positive rapport with the participant, which is beneficial for the most complete and honest answers to each question. Additionally, the researcher can use an audio recorder to fully focus on the questions and answers and can refer back to the tape at a later time (Daly, 2007).

Necessary skills of a person conducting an interview case study is someone that can ask productive questions, can listen to the answers, be adaptive when needed, has a firm understanding of the issues being studied, and is unbiased and sensitive to

contradictory evidence (Yin, 2003). As the subject exposes information that can be personal, embarrassing, emotional, or sensitive in nature, a successful qualitative researcher must abide by strict ethical codes (Stake, 2003). With these skills and the subject's care in mind, the researcher can conduct an interview that will gather beneficial data that may be helpful in their specific research study and to the social science field in general (Daly, 2007).

As the researcher asks the subject questions, he or she must be aware of the culture of the interview. This means, how the subject understands and interprets the questions being asked. Culture has various meanings to each individual so the researcher may elect to ask questions in a variety of ways. Additionally, the researcher cannot assume that the subject interprets the question in the same way as he or she meant. Not only should a researcher recognize that the subject has his or her own meanings and they should be taken into account during a successful interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

For the most complete case study data gathered through interviews I. E. Seidman suggests three different, 90-minute sessions. During the first session the interviewer asks questions that allow the subject to focus on his or her life history. The second session details the experience the interviewer is interested in and the final session reflects on the meaning of these details. By maintaining the three-session structure, the subject is able to share all the necessary information and the researcher is able to digest it all (Seidman, 1991).

After the case study is complete, the data has been analyzed, and the finished study is available to readers, it is important that the reader properly digests the information. Each reader looks at data with his or her own concepts, personal realities,

and opinions. The context of the literature will be changed and shaped differently with each reader. Individual readers will have unique experiences with varying levels of “cognitive flexibility,” or their ability to create a schema from the knowledge presented (Stake, 2003, p. 144). This means that the case study must be organized in a manner that is beneficial to readers, the field in which the case study is researched, and to anyone that will refer to the study in the future.

The data gathered through the process of interviews and compiled into a case study must be presented in a beneficial and educated way. Of primary importance is the researcher’s commitment to being reflective of the data (Stake, 2003). Additionally, the subject’s meanings, interpretations, and foreshadowed meanings must be taken into account (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Data in a case study must be presented in a way that answers the predetermined research questions, but also allows the reader to understand the complex meaning of a case (Enomoto & Bair, 2002).

**Conclusion.** Readers are able to learn vicariously from detailed data because much can be learned in only one case study (Stake, 2000; Merriam, 1998). By properly gathering data through the use of interviews and compiling it into a case study, qualitative research proves to be a beneficial research method in many professions. Of particular use to counselors who observe humans and their experiences within the world, qualitative case studies provide rich and detailed data. Though some researchers view qualitative and quantitative data as opposing fields of research, qualitative data holds great importance in the counseling field.

### **2.3 Chapter Summary**

After considering available literature in the previous review, a carefully and ethically executed same-sex parented family research study was created. Semi structured interviews were organized as the primary data collection method, which were then used to create the family case study. All of the data collected from the interviews were used to explain the parents and parents' perception of their children's experiences in family, social, and educational systems. The main research questions were used to determine if the family's experiences are in line with the available literature. Overall, the purpose of the study was to learn how one lesbian-parented home experiences social, legal, or family systems and how their family structure impacts their family's overall mental health.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

The purpose of this research study was to develop an intimate understanding of one lesbian parent family in order to learn how the family experiences the family, social, and educational systems of which they are a part. Information about the family was gathered through parental face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and compiled into a qualitative case study. The main research questions of the study were to:

1. Learn how lesbian parents experience their social, family, and children's educational systems on a daily and long term basis;
2. Learn how lesbian parents perceive their child's experience into social, family, and educational systems on a daily and long term basis; and
3. To determine any political, social, or systematic changes the family believes should be made for optimal positive experiences in social, family, and educational systems.

The following chapter will explain the reason for conducting qualitative research and why it was the best approach to use for completing a family case study. In addition, the chapter will present the qualitative case study methodology and why it was chosen for completing the research. This chapter will also explain the type of information needed for the study, the case study research design, a semi-structured interview data collection method, data analysis and synthesis, ethical considerations for the research, and issues of trustworthiness in collecting the data.

#### **3.1 Research Sample and Population**

For this single case study research, one adult lesbian couple with children, living in North Eastern Indiana, was selected to be research participants. Specifically, the

participants were selected from LaPorte, Saint Joseph, Elkhart, LaGrange, Noble, Kosciusko, Marshall, Fulton, Miami, Wabash, Huntington, Wells, Adams, and Allen counties in Indiana.

To yield the most information possible about lesbian parented families, purposeful sampling procedure was used (Patton, 2002). The researcher sought to locate families by contacting every known LGBT resource center, PRIDE group, PFLAG chapter, and LGBT women's support group in the targeted North Eastern Indiana. Each location was contacted via email with an explanation of the study. The recruitment email described the purpose, research questions, time commitment, confidentiality procedures, requirements for participating in the study, and the primary researcher's contact information for the study. For agency confidentiality requirements, each group or organization's contact person was responsible for forwarding the information, either electronically, by word of mouth, or with printed copies of the information, to families who would qualify to participate in the study. After the information reached the desired group of people, they were asked to contact the primary researcher if they were interested in participating.

This method of subject recruitment is a snowball sampling strategy, sometimes referred to as a network or chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A snowball sample is when participants are asked to refer other individuals they know who would qualify for the study. Qualifications for participation in the study included being an openly lesbian couple living in one of the previously mentioned counties, currently raising at least one child. No limitations were set regarding the children's age, as long as the parents were currently raising the child in the parents' home. Furthermore, there was

no limitation on how the children entered the family, for example, a previous heterosexual relationship, foster children, adopted children, or birth via sperm donation. A final qualification included an open family dialogue about the parents' sexual orientation. Specifically, the children needed to know that their mothers were a couple.

Five couples contacted the primary researcher expressing their desire to participate in the study, but only two families qualified. One couple did not qualify because their children were 30-33 years old and did not live with their parents. A second couple was pregnant with their first child but was not currently raising a child. The third couple was raising one mother's biological children from a previous marriage, but the children did not know of the women's lesbian sexual orientation until the children were well into their 20s. All three interested couples received an email message thanking them for their willingness to participate and were informed they did not qualify for the study.

From the two other interested couples, both met the study's guidelines. The first couple was raising one elementary aged child and had been raising him as a couple since the child was five years old. The second couple was foster parents to three teenage children and was expecting their first biological child in a few months. Both of these couples qualified for the study because they identified their sexual orientation as lesbian and were actively raising at least one child in their home. Furthermore, the parents in each family said that their child understood that they had two mothers and their mothers were a couple. The primary researcher selected one couple to participate in the study and the non-selected couple was notified and thanked for their willingness to participate in the study.



The selected family was composed of two female parents and three teenage foster daughters. The couple dated for two years before having a union ceremony in Indiana four years ago. In 2008, the couple became foster parents to a teenage daughter and in 2010, two additional daughters entered the family. Currently, one of the women is pregnant with the couple's first baby, who will be born in the spring of 2012.

For identification purposes, the family will be referred to as Parent 1, Parent 2, Child 1, Child 2, Child 3, and Unborn baby. Parent 1 is a 30-year-old female currently employed as an elementary teacher. Parent 2 is a 28-year-old female currently employed as a high school teacher. All three of the children are 16-year-old females and the sex of the unborn baby is unknown.

### **3.2 Conceptual Framework**

This single case study design examined demographic, contextual, and perceptual information about one lesbian parented family in North Eastern Indiana. In order to explore how the family experienced family, social, and educational systems, three research areas were explored to gather information to describe their experience in the following areas.

1. The lesbian parents' experiences in social, family, and their children's educational systems on a daily and long term basis.
2. The lesbian parents' perception of their children's experience in social, family, and educational systems on a daily and long term basis.
3. The family's recommendation for political, social, or systematic changes that they believe should be made for optimal positive experiences in family, social, and educational systems.

### **3.3 Context**

The necessary contextual information included understanding the details of the couple and their family. Contextual information encompassed questions about how long the couple had been together, the process of creating their family, their experiences within family, social, and educational systems, and other stories about their family. Specific contextual information sought included how the children entered the family, the experiences of the children and parents in the family, and how the family describes their family environment. In addition, information about how the family saw themselves fitting into society was of particular contextual importance.

Demographic information including the age, gender, ethnicity, background, education, and personal information about the parents and children of the family is also necessary. Specific questions focused on these topics as well as each person's occupation, when in their life they wanted children, how old the parents were when the children entered the family, how old the children currently are, the legal status of their relationship, and other questions that focused on the details of the family. Demographic information is important to understand the family's composition and how they compare to others in society.

Perceptual information was needed to understand the parents' thoughts and interpretations of their family and how their children experience family, social, and educational systems. These questions were the most crucial to completing the family's case study because they gave a deeper understanding to the family's feelings and thoughts about their family. Information about the family's perceptions included understanding how the family experiences life, whether they would change parts of their

life if able, what they perceive as important, and how their family happiness is achieved. A majority of the interview questions focused on the family's perceptions of their experiences and how they would change social, family, and educational systems if it were possible.

Overall, the purpose of the face-to-face interviews was to gather as much demographic, contextual, and perceptual information about the family as possible. Every family fact, story, or personal interpretation was relevant in creating a single case study unique to this family.

### **3.4 Overview of Procedures**

Preceding the actual data collection, a selected review of the literature was conducted to study the phenomenon of lesbian parented families, the children of lesbian parents and their experiences in schools and social situations, and the social and political importance of understanding lesbian parented families. The literature specifically noted social acceptance, psychological implications of acceptance versus rejection, and varying political support for same-sex parented families throughout the United States (Bos & Gartrell, 2010; Patterson, 2009; & Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002 ).

Following completion of the literature review, the researcher acquired approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with the research. The IRB approval process involved detailed description of all procedures and processes needed to adhere to the standards put forth for the study of human subjects. Included in IRB approval was the participants' confidentiality form and informed consent (Appendix A).

Potential research participants were then recruited from LGBT support groups in the targeted North Eastern Indiana region. The primary contact person from each group

was responsible for forwarding the information to families that would qualify for the study. Interested families contacted the researcher who then made sure that the family would qualify to participate in the study. Two couples were interested and qualified and the researcher randomly chose one family and sent the informed consent and confidentiality papers to review and sign.

Three semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the parents of the chosen family. Following each interview, the participants' responses were transcribed and analyzed. The researcher tracked information pertaining to the parents' experiences in family, social, and educational systems, the parents' perception of their children's experiences in the system, and any political or social systematic changes the family suggests in order to improve their experiences within the three systems.

### **3.5 Data Collection Methods**

Qualitative research is a valuable research method, specifically applicable to counseling and helping professions, which attempt to understand human behavior (Willis, 2007). A form of qualitative research, a case study, purposefully focuses on a subject's decisions, why they were taken, how they were implemented, and the outcome of the decision (Yin, 2009). Case studies are an investigative method that may focus on a single person, site, group, community, or system (Enomoto & Bair, 2002). In this specific study, the single-case study design focused on one family unit. When a study focuses on only one unit, such as one family, the case study is referred to as a single case study.

#### **Interview**

Interviews were selected as the primary form of data collection in this study because they investigate the subject's point of view based on their past experiences

(Willis, 2007). Three interviews were conducted, each semi-structured in nature. By completing an interview outline of acceptable questions, the researcher was prepared with a reference point for the direction of the interviews (Daly, 2007). A key component of a semi-structured interview is that the researcher must be flexible and create new questions based on the subjects' responses. In addition, semi-structured interviews allow the participants to clarify statements and the researcher can adjust the questions to gather additional information. The primary benefit of an interview is that individual can offer information that provides the interviewees perspective on their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This flexibility was a key consideration for using interviews to gather information in this study.

While there are many strengths in using interviews to collect data, there are also research limitations. For example, each research participant varies in the amount of information they are willing to disclose, which can impact the results of the study. When a participant with holds information, the study produces thin and incomplete evidence. Secondly, interviews require researcher skill in order to ask appropriate questions, organize, analyze, synthesize, and interpret the data properly. The process of subjective interpretation of interview data can negatively impact researcher neutrality resulting in a misinterpretation of the participants' message (Fontana & Frey, 2003).

### **3.6 Interview Process**

To complete this single case study, three face-to-face interviews were conducted with one lesbian parent couple in October 2011. The three interviews were used to gather stories and data from the subjects, which provided detail and insight into the subject's thoughts and experiences (Willis, 2007). The data collection, process initially produced

four different sets of data. Prior to the first interview, the parents received a pre-interview questionnaire about their family (Appendix B). The questions elicited demographic and contextual data about the parents and children. Specifically, questions focused on the age, occupation, and interests of each family member (Appendix B). In addition, questions about the family's creation were included to learn how the children entered the family. Though the parents received these questions before the first interview, an hour of the first interview was designated to review these questions and allow the interviewees to expand on their initial answers. The answers to the pre-interview questionnaire are considered the first data set.

The second data set included all of the information offered in the first parent interview that was not a part of the pre-interview questionnaire. This data included further exploration of how the family was created, legal limitations in creating the family, interests of the parents and children, and additional background information about the family.

The third set of data consisted of information gathered during the second parent interview. This semi structured interview focused on the parents' experiences and perception of their child's experiences in family, social, and educational systems. Questions asked in this interview included how the parents interacted with, experienced, and interpreted the three systems. In addition, data regarding how the parents believed their children experienced the three systems was gathered. The final topic included in the second session was about the psychological health of the parents and children, and how it was impacted by their experiences with these three systems.

Following data collection through the pre interview questionnaire and the first two interviews, all of the data was transcribed into an interview script. The researcher looked for common themes in the script including family happiness, possible discrimination, social or political challenges, and successes and failures in the family, social, and educational systems. From these themes, the third interview was conducted as a means of reflection, clarification, confirmation, and validation (Stake, 2010).

During the final interview, the interviewees further explained what it is like to be a member in their family. The parents discussed how family and political systems influence feelings and thoughts about their family. Furthermore, they offered political changes that could be made to allow for their family, and other lesbian parented families, to be more accepted in society. The interviewees also gave final thoughts about their family system and their overall psychological health.

### **3.7 Data Analysis and Synthesis**

The challenge in gathering and organizing data in a qualitative research study lies in the volume of information presented. Additionally, identifying significant patterns and themes was cumbersome. In order to organize the subjects' responses, the researcher assigned alphanumeric codes according to the categories of the study's conceptual framework. The researcher prepared large documents that were correspondingly labeled to match the codes. As the researcher sorted the data based on the codes, additional data sheets and codes were added as needed.

The researcher also prepared written narratives on each document after all of the data had been assigned. Overall, the researcher's approach was to come up with a number of patterns, clusters, or themes that linked together and described the research

subject. The process occurred in three steps, which included first examining the common themes and patterns in each category. Secondly, the researcher compared patterns across all of the categories. Finally, the current work was analyzed and was compared and contrasted with issues expressed in the available LGBT literature. Based on the analysis, the researcher was able to consider the subjects' responses and the implications of the research. Several conclusions were formulated and developed along with various practical and research-related recommendations.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

This research study was developed and executed with issues relating to the protection of participants being of primary importance. The research process was voluntary and prior to conducting the interviews, the participants were informed about the study's purpose. Although it was anticipated that no serious ethical threats were posed to the participants and their well being, the study was designed to protect the rights of the participants.

Prior to participating in the study, participants received an informed consent document, found in Appendix A, detailing the study, the expectations of the participants, and issues of confidentiality and professionalism. The written consent explained that taking part in the study was voluntary and the subjects could withdraw at any time. Secondly, the participants' rights were paramount in data collection and analysis. The researcher was committed to keeping the names and/or other identifying characteristics confidential. Cautionary measures were taken to secure the storage of research-related audio recordings, transcriptions, and other data. Nobody other than the primary researcher had access to this material.



### **3.9 Limitations of the Study**

This qualitative research study included limitations based on the research design and method. However, the study was structured to lessen the impact of these limitations. Qualitative research methods must consider the interpretation, thoughts, and choices of the researcher. Researcher bias, assumptions, interests, and perceptions could have entered into the study, causing it to be a key limitation. Furthermore, the interviewees may have had difficulty expressing all of their thoughts to the researcher. The single case study design employed only one family's participation in the study, a further limitation.

Recognizing these limitations, the researcher took the following measures. First, she acknowledged her research method and stated her assumptions before data collection and analysis. The researcher documented her assumptions about lesbian parented families before gathering data. By considering all preconceived biases about lesbian couples and families, the researcher was better able to collect data with an open mind. Furthermore, she made a conscious attempt to consider ways she might influence the participants. Also, she attempted to create an environment that was conducive to honest and open interview answers.

A major limitation of this study was that the research sample was restricted to geographical area as well as family structure. Therefore, a critique of this research might be the limited possibility to generalize the study to other lesbian family experiences. While generalizability was not an intended goal of the study, the research findings may transfer to others because of its descriptive detail and information regarding the context and background of the study. However, the phenomenon of lesbian parented families

encompasses diverse family experiences, which will vary based on each person in the family unit.

When the research study was created and submitted for IRB approval, the researcher did not know what type of family would eventually be selected to participate in the study. Therefore, the IRB approval stated that only the parents would be interviewed. It was possible that the selected family would have young children who were unable to be interviewed. However, the teenagers in the selected family could have offered very valuable information about their experiences in their family, social, and educational systems. Though the children did not directly offer their thoughts on the systems, the parents relayed their perceptions of their children's interactions in the three systems.

### **3.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a detailed description of the study's qualitative research study methodology, which was used to illustrate how lesbian parented families experience their family, social, and educational systems. Three semi-structured interviews were used for data collection in addition to a questionnaire. The data was reviewed against available literature about lesbian parented families and their experiences. Following data collection and interpretation, the information was used to create a case study and draw key findings about the same sex parented family.

## **Chapter IV: Presentation of Findings**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore one lesbian parent family's experiences in family, social, and educational systems. The researcher believed that understanding one particular family's experiences would offer additional information about lesbian parents and their family systems, which is minimal in the published literature. Data was gathered through a case study design and presents the life of one lesbian parent family. Including the positive and negative experiences in their lives, this information may add to our understanding of this phenomenon.

This case study used in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data about the subjects as well as a demographic information questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to learn the couple's names, ages, occupation, family structure, how they interact with their children, and basic demographic information about the children. Participants in the study included two female individuals, who defined their sexual orientation as lesbian, and were raising three foster children as a couple. The data gathered through the interviews and questionnaire were coded, analyzed, and organized by research question. The study was based on the following three research questions:

1. How do lesbian parents experience their social, family, and children's educational system on a daily and long term basis?
2. How do lesbian parents perceive their child's experience in social, family, and educational systems on a daily and long term basis?
3. What political, social, or systematic changes, if any, need to be made for optimal positive experiences in social, family, educational systems?

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from three semi-structured interviews with one lesbian couple currently raising three children. The information includes narrative description, direct quotations, and parental interpretation of specific life events. The purpose of this chapter is to present the data as well as interpret the findings in a deeper, more holistic manner. Findings of particular importance are themes found throughout the experiences of the research participants, the way the participants explained and connected them and the consistency or inconsistency between the participants' reports and relevant literature on lesbian parented families and children of lesbian parents. The implications of these findings are intended to be used to help further understand lesbian parents and their children.

Six major findings emerged from this study's analysis of the parental perceptions provided:

1. All members of the family, including the two parents and three foster children, have experienced at least minor discrimination from their biological or extended families because of their family structure.
2. Both parents feel that they and their children are accepted into their school system and have few negative feelings about school.
3. The family's social support system is strong and the children each have extracurricular activities, friends, and exposure to many types of people with whom they all enjoy spending time.
4. The parents view their relationship with each other and with all three children as positive, healthy, and supportive. They feel close to each of the foster children and consider them as their own.

5. The family has faced legal and social struggles in creating and maintaining their family.
6. Suggested social or political improvements that would improve the family's life include educating society about gay and lesbian families, legally recognizing gay and lesbian relationships, offering legal support for parenting children, and couple and family healthcare benefits equal to heterosexual couples.

The following is a discussion that supports the six research findings. In order for the reader to understand the information offered by the subjects, a “thick description” technique will be used (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 540). Thick description details many experiences of the subject so the reader can understand the study, the research participants, and the experiences of the subjects (Ponterotto, 2006). The description will include subject narratives, quotes, and answers to the semi-structured interview questions. In addition, the data will be compared and contrasted to available published literature about lesbian parented families.

**4.1 Finding 1: The parents reported that all members of the family have experienced at least minor discrimination from their biological or extended families based on their family structure.**

A primary finding of this study is that both parents have expressed emotional difficulty after experiencing varying levels of family discrimination. The first of the three primary research questions sought to understand how the lesbian parents in the family experience their families, social networks, and the educational system of their children. In order to learn about the parents' experiences within their biological families,

the researcher guided the semi-structured interview with questions about their extended families. One interview question was, “As individuals and a couple, how do you interact with your extended family?” The purpose of this question was to understand how the women’s parents, siblings, and extended families viewed the couple and their family.

Both women said that their parents and siblings are very accepting of the couple and their children. The children call the women’s parents “Grandma” and “Grandpa” and are included in all family events. Parent 2 said that family is very important and they enjoy spending time as a couple with the three children as well as with their extended family. Parent 1’s biological brother is so supportive of the couple’s relationship that he was the sperm donor for the couple’s first child together.

However, Parent 1 shared that some members of her extended family do not support her romantic relationship and their desire to parent. Parent 1’s paternal grandmother “feels sorry for our [unborn] baby because it’s not our baby and one day it’s going to grow up and be angry that it’s life was ruined because of us. [The discrimination] is based on their religious ideas. That’s been really hard.” Parent 1 attempted to work on her relationship with her grandmother, but said “it’s done at this point.”

Recently, all three children heard a negative discussion with Parent 1’s grandmother. Parent 1 and 2 explained that it is difficult on the children to see the disagreements “impact us emotionally.” While both parents say that the family discrimination is difficult to handle, they view these non-accepting members of the family as “good people, but [they] judge based on misconceptions about gay people.” In addition, Parent 2 said members of her father’s side of the family do not approve of their

lesbian parented family but they are not as vocal as Parent 1's family about the disapproval.

In discussion of a family member's concern about lesbian parents, a 2002 study revealed that children raised by lesbian mothers are within normal ranges for self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and parenting stress. Lesbian mothers help the children resolve conflict, feel supported in society, and learn to cope with many types of problems (Perrin, 2002). Ultimately, children raised by lesbian mothers do not differ from children raised by heterosexual parents in areas of personality, peer relationships, self-esteem, behavioral difficulties, academic success, or quality of family relationships (Perrin, 2002). In the studied family, the parents do not see personality differences in their daughters because of their own sexuality.

Though the parents' experiences within their family systems are mostly positive, they described negativity from specific family members. According to the American Psychological Association, lesbian couples have satisfying and healthy relationships that offer the same personal fulfillment as heterosexual couples (APA, 2005). Family members who are not open to the couple's relationship and child rearing are perhaps unaware that lesbian parented families can have the same level of family stability for a child as heterosexual couples. Additionally, parents who are not supported in raising their children may have a lower overall well-being (Weber, 2008). Though the parents have some family members who are unsupportive of their parenting, many of their family members are extremely supportive and involved with the parents and children.

With some family members questioning their family structure, living an authentic life is important to the parents. Regardless of an individual's comments, the parents say

that they are happy within their family and want to express their genuine selves. The battle between authenticity and social pressures can be strenuous, with mental health often negatively impacted (Weber, 2008). However, the couple is able to move past the comments in order to live their life as they desire.

The parents describe their relationships with their three children as very positive and loving. Both parents said they could not have predicted how their family would be structured and the happiness they would feel because of their three daughters. The parents feel respected and appreciated by their children, which is in keeping with studies that say children who are close to their parents have confidence at home and in school (Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Additional studies showed that successful parenting leads to improved overall life satisfaction and connect with children (Bos & Gartrell, 2010). This is of particular importance for the family because both the parents and the daughters are very happy in their family. The children's attachment to their parents and success in the family system is due to the care their parents give to them in their family system.

Often experiencing more family discrimination are the three children, who entered the family via the foster care system. The parents explained that child 1's biological mother does not support her daughter living with "a family of gay people," even though she herself has dated women in the past. Child 3 did not know she would be living with lesbian parents until she first arrived at the house. Her mother did not tell her anything about the parents because she did not want her biological daughter living with lesbian parents. "Some people in her family hate homosexuals while others don't say anything, but she knows they don't like it."



The parents said that Child 2 has experienced the most family discrimination living with lesbian foster parents and being gay herself. When Child 2's biological parents discovered she was gay, Parent 1 and 2 were called unfit parents and had to testify in court. The accusations against the parents included "brainwashing her into being a lesbian even though she was dating girls long before she came here. They said she lied about stuff so she could live here because we would let her do whatever she wants to do. We had to testify on the stand. They separated us, it was ridiculous. It was really scary." All of the accusations were found to be untrue, but Child 2 continued to experience a great deal of distress because her biological family did not accept her sexual orientation.

In addition to feelings of not being accepted by her biological family, Child 2's family did not allow her to go near her younger cousins or be alone with them. If she were to be heterosexual and have a boyfriend, her family would welcome him into the home. However, her girlfriends were not allowed to come over at all. Members of her family are "very against homosexuality because they are very religious."

**4.2 Finding 2: The parents feel that they and their children are accepted into their school system and have little to no negative feelings about school.**

In the educational system, the family has had unique experiences because both parents are teachers in their children's school district. They reported little discrimination directed towards them or their family in their present teaching positions. Parent 1 said maybe they feel more accepted into the school system because they are both teachers in the school. With access to the girls' grades and attendance through a teacher computer network, they are always aware of their children's school records. This accessibility to

school records is a privilege that other parents do not have and may help their feelings of inclusion in the school system.

However, the parents' sexual orientation is an issue that they have considered in relation to their professions. They both keep their family life private from students, as directed by their school and as a personal choice. Parent 1 is an elementary teacher and Parent 2 is a high school teacher. In her current position Parent 1 says she tries not to talk about her family but elementary children are always trying to find out details about her life. She says the following about her sexual orientation and her career in education:

"I know for sure it's not something we're allowed to talk about in the lower level. They told me I'm not allowed to talk to my [students] about my family, which makes things really tricky, once we had our own kids especially. At first it was just the two of us, but then my name changed [when we got married] and they would ask if I had a husband and I said 'no.' But they never caught on. But now, we have the girls and we have a baby coming and that's going to make this year really tricky because I'm not having a baby, so if I'm getting excited about the birth of this baby and I'm going to be leaving for a few weeks to stay home, it's going to be confusing. It's hard because you want to be excited and share it and that's one of the things about being a teacher, you share with your students so they can connect to you and have that bond."

Parent 1 says that previous classes have figured out that she is gay and have been supportive and her sexuality was not an issue. Parent 2 says that she assumes that her students know she is gay. While she uses the occasional example involving her children, she does not discuss her sexuality at work. If students ask about her personal life she replies by saying it is a personal question. When asked about how her sexuality impacts

her job she says, “I don’t worry about getting into it. I don’t feel the need to talk about it in class and it doesn’t come up as much. However, [when leading] the GSA (Gay Straight Alliance club) and with coaching, they know I’m gay.”

While she is able to keep her personal and professional life separate in her current position, Parent 2’s first year of teaching was negative. She describes the school as “a little country school” where she was a basketball coach in addition to a teacher. “I was pulled in and told I wasn’t allowed in the locker room.” She joked and said, “when is the coach ever in the locker room when they’re getting changed?” It was anticipated that her biology position would turn into a full time position, but at the end of her first year she was told that she “had the right to interview for the position but were looking for the ‘right fit.’” She believes that her sexuality was the reason they were looking for additional candidates rather than hiring her for the following year.

In addition, a student wrote her a threatening email and called her a “faggot.” When she presented the note to the principal, he retaliated towards her and did not discipline the student. Overall, she said that she had a rough first year with a lot of discrimination. However, since teaching in a bigger city school, she is able to have positive teaching and coaching experiences.

In their current teaching positions, the parents are able to log onto a school grading website and check in on their girls’ grades and attendance. They feel very accepted in their positions and when asked about their experiences with their children and the school system they said, “We haven’t had much resistance and maybe that’s because we are teachers ourselves. Maybe other lesbian parents are having more problems. We’re in a bigger city and maybe that helps. We haven’t had any negative experiences.”

Academically, all three children do well in school. Child 1 gets mostly A's and B's with a few C's, but it was explained that she is not putting her full effort into school. Child 2 and 3 both get A and B grades. The children enjoy Biology, art, French, creative writing, English, and theater classes. In their current schools, the parents said the three girls have had mostly positive experiences with peers and faculty. Parent 1 and 2 explained that when the girls hear other students talking about gay people in negative ways, they all stand up in support of gay students and families. When Child 1 hears someone use the word "gay" used as a negative descriptive word, for example, "that's so gay," she uses those opportunities to educate others. Child 1's friends understand her feelings about gay and lesbian people and consciously avoid the use of derogatory language.

Child 3 is known for "going off" on peers when they say anything negative about gay people, either in school or on social media sites such as Facebook. While both parents support walking away if the children are confronted by others in school, Child 3 gets very upset when she hears negative gay comments. Following a family discussion about negative comments, the parents say that Child 3 feels that "it's none of their business so why do they comment when it has nothing to do with them?" In addition, Child 3 is very proud of her family and tells others that she has "two moms and two sisters, get over it! If you have an issue I don't want to hear it!"

Child 2's experiences in the school system depend on the day. She has experienced the most comments in school because both she and her parents are lesbians. "[Child 2] is currently dating a girl, so what people say to her might be directed at her and not just gay people in general," says Parent 2. Child 2 is asked in school if she is still

a lesbian or if she could be bisexual now. People who say “oh she’s gay” used in a negative tone tease her when she hugs her girlfriend in the hallway. However, she knows a male gay teacher who has supported her with issues in the past and she sees anti-bullying posters in school. Parent 2 says that sometimes Child 2 is into teenage drama and sometimes brings issues onto herself. Regardless of the reason for school teasing or issues, Child 2 is aware that bullying has taken people’s lives in the past and she does not like people commenting on her life when they do not understand it.

When describing the girls’ everyday atmosphere at school the parents say that it is a supportive atmosphere where they, as children of lesbian parents in addition to other gay and lesbian children, are generally accepted. Students feel comfortable ‘coming out’ in schools and there are many gay and bisexual students as well as clubs such as the Gay Straight Alliance and supportive teachers. Parent 2 explains:

“It’s different from when we were in school. My school was 1,000 people and there were those people you knew of that were gay. Like that guy or this girl. I was ‘that girl’ but I didn’t have problems with teachers, even then. In those ten years there’s been a lot done in the high schools, at least in the more city areas.”

In addition to openly gay and lesbian students, the children are aware of anti bullying messages shared through posters, presentations, and teachers. In schools, the children see posters about degrading remarks and the consequences, which includes comments about gay people. After an instance of negative lesbian comments in school, a gay teacher supported Child 2. Overall, the parents think their daughters are doing well in school both academically and socially. They see that “there’s been a lot done in the

high schools” in the city areas too be more accepting to diverse students, including those from lesbian families (Rimalower & Caty, 2009).

Regardless of the children’s social experiences, they are open about their family and support it with pride. This opposes Rimalower and Caty’s 2009 study that said that children of lesbian parents often hide their family structure for fear of teasing and discrimination. The parents report that the girls do not make attempts to hide their family from others in any system, including social and family systems. While all of the girls experience some comments about their parents’ sexuality when at school, they see anti bullying messages that support gay people in their school (Rimalower & Caty, 2009).

**4.3 Finding 3: The family’s social support system is strong and the children each have extracurricular activities, friends, and exposure to many types of people to which they all enjoy spending time.**

Socially, the parents of the family say they have a very large friend group around the state of Indiana. They report having many close personal friends through Parent 2’s professional athletic league and their involvement planning and running local PRIDE events. During the school year they do not see their friends as much because they are very busy with teaching and the children’s schedules. However, they visit friends and have friends over to the house at least once a month. Additionally, the family belongs to a local United Church of Christ that they attend together each Sunday.

For the children, friends are always invited over to the home. Parent 2 says, “we are stricter than many parents about where they can go, but the kids appreciate it. We don’t mind having people over. I’d rather have them here instead of worrying about them when they’re at someone else’s house.” Before being allowed to go to a friend’s home,

the parents need to meet and approve of the friend. This allows them to know the girls' friends and the parents say they know many of their close friends. In addition, they "try and give them opportunities for their friends to come over," and at the time of the interview, they were planning a Halloween party.

The parents do not believe their children have negative experiences with their friends because of their parents' sexual orientation. For example, they are not bullied, treated unfairly, or tormented because of their family. However, there are some instances when the girls stand up to others about their family. Each of the girls have had different experiences with their social groups.

Child 1 has many friends and speaks positively about her lesbian parented family with friends. When someone uses the word "gay" inappropriately, she takes the opportunity to educate others about her family. Child 1 explains how using the word "gay" as a derogator term hurts her family and makes her upset. Similarly, Child 3 stands up for her family and believes people are "ignorant" when others comment on her family. The parents explained that the girls are aware that gay people sometimes take their own life because of bullying from others. They want to educate others about gay families because it hurts them when they hear negative comments. The children are proud of their family and do not like to hear people talk negatively about gay people. The parents say that they do not encourage the daughters' anger when the girls get upset at others, but they are defensive of their family and try and educate others about gay people and their own family.

The parents say that Child 2 is currently struggling with her friend group and many of them are becoming more "acquaintances" rather than friends. It was explained

that she has trust issues and would rather keep to herself. The parents say that Child 2 creates a lot of drama with her friends and they do not believe her troubles with friends has to do with her own or their sexuality. Child 2 has experienced more comments from peers than the other children and Parent 2 says “what people say to her might be directed at her and not just gay people in general.” Child 2’s own sexual orientation is more of an issue for her than her parents’ sexual orientation. The parents explained that Child 2 is sometimes approached in social situations and in school and asked if she still is a lesbian or if she could now be bisexual. In addition, she has been called a “lesbian” in the hallway for hugging her girlfriend. Though she is a gay, the peers that have called out to her have used the word in a negative way. While she may have issues with friends and people she interacts with in social situations, Child 2 has a few close friends and a girlfriend.

The parents say that Child 3 has more friends in high school than she did in middle school. She has worked through past anger issues and has become very social as she has gotten older. The parents explained that when Child 3 moved into the home, she did not talk for a few days. She was very shy and it has taken her some time to adjust and be more comfortable with her family and schoolmates. However, now she has a mix of male and female friends at school.

**4.4 Finding 4: The parents view their relationship with each other and with all three children as positive, healthy, and supportive. They feel close to each of the foster children and consider them as their own.**

The parents both spoke very fondly of their three foster daughters and their family. They said that when the girls first moved in, they went through a “honeymoon



period” when everyone got along. This was followed by a time with more fighting and arguing. Initially, the girls would get hurt feelings because of the fighting but they realized that their fights were typical sibling arguments. When the girls argue now, they get over it quickly and remain friends.

Parent 2 describes her family’s life as “controlled chaos” because the girls have busy schedules including school, activities, and therapies that they attend each week. However, the family always has time for family activities such as eating dinner together every night at their dining room table, watching movies, going on walks, shopping for clothes, playing with their two dogs, going on vacations, and having new spontaneous family adventures.

The parents say that the girls consider their foster family their “real family” because it is the first time they have been a part of a family that supports them. Parent 2 says that they all love spending time together and the girls “can come to us about anything” when they need to talk. She also says, “we’re really big on family, we like being with our family.”

Parent 1 says that the girls are so much a part of the family that it is difficult remembering that they have not always been together as a family unit. She says, “when I see pictures of them when they were younger I think, oh we missed out on that. Because, you know, we feel like they’re our girls. And our families feel like they’re our daughters and they call our parents grandma and grandpa. We love it and it seems like this is what our family is and that’s why it’s so hard when you hear people attack families like ours because it’s like, ‘ahh!’ you haven’t experienced our lives because we’re here and we’re

having a good time and we love each other. That's how it is (Parent 1 tears up). Yeah, we love each other."

Holidays are also a difficult time for the family because, if requested, the girls are required to spend time with their biological family. Parent 1 says that the girls sometimes get mad when they have to leave them to go to their biological families. "They don't like missing out on family events." She also says, "we want to spend the holidays with them and we don't want to give them up. But if their biological family wants them, they have to go there."

All members of the family think their everyday routine is very normal. However, they realize that other people may not see it that way. Parent 2 explains:

"This is how it is, and this is our life. It's not until someone points it out to us that it's like, oh this is not a normal family. Sorry, I guess there's no male around and so that makes it awkward for people. But I mean, it's just weird because this is our daily life functioning: we go to work, they go to school, we come home, we have dinner, we talk, we love each other, and then we go to the next day. It's not until people look at us funny or try and figure out how we're all related... It's not until things like that that we realize we don't fit the norm with our family unit."

While there are times that the parents feel they have to explain their family to others, they say that parenting their three daughter has been very rewarding and they would not change anything about their family. Parent 1 says that a few years ago if she thought about her family in the future, she never would have expected to have the family she currently does but she "wouldn't have it any other way." In addition, the parents thought about their parenting options for approximately six months before deciding to be

foster parents. They both are pleased with this decision and attribute being foster parents to helping them “find their parenting styles.”

Parent 1 says that each of the girls has had very traumatic lives and “we have to instill some things in them at an older age that usually you would instill at a younger age. We try and build their self confidence in spite of their difficult past.” When the couple’s first baby is born, they hope that the child “will have confidence growing up because of the family environment.” They both believe that they will be the same parents to the baby as they are to their three daughters. Parent 1 says, “We’ll be the same parents, parenting to a different age, but the same parents.”

From their past experiences with their biological families in addition to their feelings about living with lesbian parents, the girls feel closer to their foster family than with their biological family. The parents say that the girls do not like to leave when their biological family requests to see them. They also do not like to miss holidays or special trips with their foster family. The parents report that the children are angry when they have to leave their foster family to be with their biological family. As observed in the family’s home during data collection, the daughters are extremely respectful and loving to their members of the family. The parents described the daughters’ relationships with one another as “normal siblings” who fight with each other and then quickly make up. Though there is sometimes fighting between siblings, the girls “love each other a lot” and are happy within their family.

Other instances of family happiness are when the girls come to their parents with various personal, family, friend, or school related issues. The parents say the girls feel comfortable speaking to them about most topics, which the parents believe is important.

Open family dialogue has been critical in getting the daughters to open up to one another and the parents. When she first entered the family, Child 3 was very shy and would not interact with other members of the family. The parents attribute her changes from shy to very sociable to family closeness and discussions.

Constant parent and child communication is important for increase family connection (Bos & Gartrell, 2010). The parents believe that their children feel close enough to them as parents to lessen the negative impact of stigmas they experience, either from their families or society. Regardless of their biological family's thoughts about same sex parents, the girls are close to their parents and do not have behavioral problems (Wainright & Patterson, 2006).

For fun, the family enjoys typical family entertainment such as games, going to the movies, eating out, dinner at the dining room table, going on walks, being spontaneous, shopping for clothes, and having lots of fun. The parents say that their favorite thing to do with their daughters is to travel and enjoy time together.

#### **4.5 Finding 5: The family has faced legal and social struggles in creating and maintaining their family.**

Legal limitations have impacted the family since the couple first decided to become married approximately four years ago. Gay marriage is not legal in Indiana, where the couple resides. They had a union ceremony at a United Church of Christ, an open and affirming church that the couple attends. They say that while they have thought about being married in Canada or another state where gay marriage is legal, they think of themselves as a married couple and do not need the legal document. If gay marriage

becomes legal in Indiana, they would get married so they could receive the legal rights of marriage.

Following their union ceremony, Parent 1 changed her last name to be the same as Parent 2. They did this because they knew they wanted to have kids in the future and wanted both parents and the children to have the same last name. After being married, the couple thought about adoption, foster parenting, or having their own child for six months before deciding on foster parenting.

The process of becoming foster parents includes completing a great deal of paperwork, having background checks, and an investigation into the family's income and size of the parents' house. Next, the parents attended educational classes about being foster parents and how to parent. The parents are currently "therapeutic foster parents," which means they receive extra training in CPR, first aide, and how to deal with their daughter's diabetes. Once all of these steps were taken, the parents were put on a waiting list.

Parent 2 believes that it took a long time to get a child placed in their home because of their sexual orientation. She explained:

"Other [foster parents] were talking about how they had like six, seven, or eight kids and every time one left they have another one. And we had zero children and two extra rooms and zero children! We're just like, we are good parents!"

After seeing other people have constant foster children in their home, the parents' friend, also a foster parent, forwarded them information about children in need. Then the parents called the necessary legal authorities about the child and had visitations with their first daughter for five months before she was allowed to move in. They said, "Once

people got to know us we started to get more calls, at least it seemed like, for teenagers.” They believe that it was easier to have teenagers placed in the home because other people were scared of raising teenagers. Parent 2 said, “I think people are scared of teenagers, but the cool thing is when you take them in, I feel very much appreciated by them. We do a good job of telling them we appreciate each other and value them. I think that’s a cool thing.”

The parents initially planned to foster children ages ten and under, but after having their first daughter in the home, they only had three babies placed with them. Throughout their three and a half years of foster parenting they have had eight children, which included their daughter who has lived with them for three and a half years, three babies, two teenagers, and their other two daughters who have lived with them for one year.

In each of their own separate cases, the courts have decided that all three daughters will remain in the family indefinitely. The parents said that they are lucky that the courts consider the wishes of the girls because they are older. The parents report that all three girls are happy in their current family and are excited to be in a supportive home and the parents are glad they decided on foster parenting. Parent 1 said that “lots of agencies don’t adopt to same sex couples in Indiana” because of their religious affiliation. “Even DCS, who we work with, is a little more apprehensive on [same sex parented] adoption.” They are thankful that each member was able to join their happy family.

In addition to the legal parameters of their relationship and becoming foster parents, the couple has used fertility treatments to help create their family. Currently, Parent 2 is pregnant with the couple’s first baby. Parent 1’s biological brother was the

sperm donor for the couple who became pregnant through artificial insemination. It was very important for the couple to know the father of the baby and for the baby to physically look like both women. Parent 1 said:

“We thought the conversation, like this is your uncle, he gave us something we didn’t have to help make you. He’s still going to be a part of your life but he’s your uncle and we’re your parents. We thought that conversation was a lot easier and more healthy to have instead of your dad is a sperm donor we don’t have a name for, we don’t have a picture of, and some day you’re going to want to leave and search for. We didn’t want to have these lingering daddy issues. We wanted it to know who the dad was and we don’t feel weird about that. Because it’s not uncommon for heterosexual couples to look to their family if they’re having fertility problems.”

In addition to physical appearance, the parents wanted to know the baby’s father in case there were ever to be any health issues. Overall, the parents say that they have a lot of trust in Parent 1’s brother; that he will not come back to them and want rights over the baby. Parent 1 says that she and her brother have discussed him being a sperm donor “since we were younger. It’s always been something we’ve talked about if I ever needed it.”

When the baby is born, Parent 1 will legally adopt the child to be the second parent. Parent 2 will already be the biological mother and because the couple already has the same last name, the child will have the same name as his or her parents. The social challenges in going through the artificial insemination process and eventually explaining who the baby’s father is, is a conversation the parents are ready to have. In regard to the social idea that children need male role models Parent 2 says,

“We understand when people say [children] need to have positive male role models. That’s what uncles and grandparents are for. They allow us to do those things. I don’t understand how not having a male or not having a female is important. You have loving parents and that’s what you need. The girls, they have members of the family that aren’t loving to them, whether they’re male or female, and that’s hurtful and has hurt them. We’re two loving people and that’s what’s important.”

Though the family reports a very happy family unit, they have faced social and legal pressures in the past. A primary societal stressor to many lesbian parents is to raise heterosexual and gender-normative children who will be considered “normal” (Lev, 2010). In the studied family, one daughter is openly gay, which is criticized by her biological family. Sexual orientation became such a large issues that the parents were required to testify in court about their intentions in raising Child 2. The parents were blamed for their daughter’s sexuality and they had to prove that they were “normal” parents and did not influence their foster daughter’s sexual orientation in order to pass typical societal expectations (Lev, 2010).

With legal and societal pressures sometimes impacting the family, the parents’ friend network and support is very important in their lives. Some of the couple’s friends are also gay, though most of them do not have children at the present time. However, the friends are very supportive of the family and the couple’s decision to raise children. Studies have shown that even within the gay and lesbian community, opinions are varied about same sex couples parenting (Weber, 2008). With the couple’s social support, the children interact with many types of people, which is important for their lives in a same sex parented family.



The children of the studied family unit know and are supported by the parents' friends and in social groups such as PRIDE. The mothers' involvement in PRIDE allows the girls to meet many of their parents' friends and be participants in the gay community. A 2008 study said that children who are raised with active participation in the lesbian community become more comfortable with their family structure (Bos & Van Balen, 2008). This seems to be in keeping with the studied family because all family members are active and supportive of their parents' lesbian social network.

In addition to their own social networks, the parents interact with their children's social groups. Speaking about their daughters' friend groups, the parents say that they are stricter than other parents. Before going to a friend's house, the mothers must know who the friend is and meet his or her parents. The girls must also be home at a predetermined time, which is strictly followed. The mothers believe that their daughters appreciate the structure and they know the rules are for their own benefit. Finally, the mothers say that they know most of their daughters' friends and approve of the people they call friends.

Parental participation in their children's social groups has been linked to well socialized children. The more the parents are able to be a part of their child's social group, the more likely it is for the child to feel accepted by their family and friends (Rohner, 1999). The studied family aligns with this study because the children appreciate their mothers' concern when they are with friends and they gladly allow their mothers to meet their friends.

**4.6 Finding 6: Suggested social or political improvements that would improve the family's life include educating society about gay and lesbian families, legally recognizing gay and lesbian relationships, offering legal support for parenting children, and family healthcare befits equal to heterosexual couples.**

When asked to explain if there are social or political changes that could be made to improve their lives and the children's lives, the parents said that further education and legal support are necessary. The family has faced challenging legal barriers in creating and maintaining their family unit. To begin, gay marriage is not legal in Indiana (Barbaro & Confessore, 2011; & Patterson, 2009). This means that regardless of the couple's dedication to one another, the state will not legally recognize their marriage. However, the couple participated in a union ceremony through their church and they considered themselves married.

In order to have the same last name, Parent 1 legally changed her name to Parent 2's last name. This way their child would have the same last name as both of his or her parents. Though the couple considers themselves married, they are not able to reap the benefits of a legal marriage. These benefits include family plan health insurance and legal parental rights for both parents (Green, 2004).

The lack of legal support for the couple means that Parent 1 will have to legally adopt their child after Parent 2 gives birth (Patterson, 2009). In a heterosexual family, when a couple has a child they are both legally parents. However, this is not the case for lesbian parented families. Additionally, the couple cannot have a family health insurance plan because they are not legally married. Instead, Parent 2 will have to have a family plan to cover the couple's new baby and Parent 1 will continue to pay for her own health

insurance. Without a family plan, they will pay more in health insurance than they would if they were considered a family.

Parent 1 said, “In society, in general, educating people and passing laws to make things equal that would change our lives enough that it would start changing society as a whole. If the government recognized us as a gay couple, that would start us on a path of acceptance.” The lack of legal support is a challenge to the family because they struggle to be considered a couple and parents. A great concern for the couple is maintaining their jobs. In the area of Indiana where the couple resides, individuals can be fired for being gay (Patterson, 2009). This creates additional job related stress because gay people must constantly separate their professional and personal lives. For the couple, they make a constant effort to make sure they do not discuss their personal lives with students.

The couple says that they will be paying additional money in health insurance because they cannot have a family plan. Parent 2 will have a family health insurance plan but Parent 1 will have to have her own plan. Rather than having all members included on the family plan, they have to have two separate plans because they are not legally considered a couple.

When the couple first decided to be foster parents, they believe they experienced some discrimination in getting their first child placement. Studies have shown that lesbian couples can have difficulty receiving the same services as heterosexual parents, especially within the adoption and foster care system (Roos, Epstein, Goldfinger, Steele, Anderson, Strike, 2008). The couple saw other foster parents with excess children and they did not have any. In order to get their first child, the couple learned about children in need from another foster parent friend and had to call specifically about certain

children. After they had their first placement, they received more calls to be foster parents for teenagers. In keeping with prior research about lesbian parented families, the couple experienced difficulties becoming foster parents because of their sexuality. Many adoption and foster systems tend to favor married heterosexual parents, which made it difficult for the couple to become parents (Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004).

Another legal issue the couple has faced including testifying about being foster parents to Child 2. Child 2's biological family blamed the couple for "brainwashing" her into being a lesbian. The parents were intimidated by the process of testifying and were scared for their daughter. While the courts determined that the parents were healthy and not guilty of any wrongdoing, they were attacked purely because of their sexuality. This was a challenge the family faced and overcame in order to maintain their family structure. Unfortunately, it is common for lesbian parents to face pressures to raise heterosexual children (Lev, 2010). This was the case with the studied family who was accused of making or allowing Child 2 to be gay.

Prior to being foster parents, the couple considered adoption. However, they decided adoption was not right for their family because many adoption agencies have religious affiliations and are careful about placing children with gay or lesbian parents. Adoption systems tend to favor traditional, heterosexual couples instead of same sex parented families (Ryan, Pearlmutter, & Groza, 2004). Ultimately, the couple decided on insemination to have their first baby together. They expressed their confidence in being parents though law are unequal for same sex couples and their families. Ultimately, the couple would like to see laws that support same sex couples.

Parent 2 sees similarities between being gay in America today and being an African American individual during the civil rights era. She says, “Obviously we don’t have the same struggle as African Americans did in the time of civil rights, but I see that there are some parallels because there are people who are beaten, bullied, and killed for who they are.”

In the girls’ lives, the parents see their biological families being very judgmental about their foster family. The parents say that there are lots of good families in the world and if the children are in a good family then their biological family should not have any trouble with it. However, when the girls’ biological families are judgmental, the parents see it negatively impact the girls. Especially Child 2, who is gay herself. The parents say that it would be easier if her biological family was more accepting because they do not like her and she still loves them very much.

Overall, the family struggles with the definition of a “normal family.” Parent 2 said the following about how her family is viewed by others.

“If you explained our family and just left out gender: you know we come home, we eat dinner, we go out on walks and go to the movies, we talk and laugh and get in arguments. People would say, ‘oh that’s a normal family.’ And then you say, it’s parented by two women, then people would say, ‘oh well now it’s certainly not ok.’ I’m sorry I don’t have enough testosterone to make this a normal family.”

The parents think of their family as normal though they realize that sometimes people do not agree. They joked that if other people came to their home for a day and got to know their family rather than judging them from afar, they would realize they were a normal and healthy family. Parent 1 said, “This is our life, this is who we are. Don’t

judge what we have going on when you don't know us... We're a happy, healthy, functional family."

As final closing thoughts for the interviews, the parents said their family is "waiting for the transition to where homosexuality is not looked upon as unfavorably as it currently is." Until that time, the parents and children are happy within the family. The children are in the first family unit that supports and loves them, and the parents are ready to give their foster children and unborn baby the structure and family they need. While all members of the family have experienced some discrimination in family, social, and school systems, they all feel loved, mentally and emotionally supported, and physically as well as mentally healthy within in their family, social, and school systems. Parent 1 concluded, "We're two loving people raising three wonderful daughters. Soon we'll have a new baby too. We're a family, regardless of blood relation, we're a loving family."

The legal struggles of this lesbian family have been many due to Indiana's view on gay marriage, organizational inequality in the health care system, and untrue comments from individuals in the foster care system. Though the parents would like legal support of their marriage and their family, they move through their life successfully and with great pride in their family.

#### **4.7 Synthesis**

The greatest theme throughout the parental interviews is the concept of normal and normality. If a family, social, or educational system does not see a gay person or family as "normal," they can be judged, discriminated against, or treated unfairly. In the studied family, they are constantly compared to other, more "normal" heterosexual families because of heteronormativity within society. The couple says that if the

government would recognize them as a couple, they would feel more equal and accepted in society.

Following legal support, the couple thinks that education is key to raising people who are accepting of gay and lesbian people and families. When considering their children's school, the couple sees great changes being made to educate children about bullying and acceptance of diverse students. These changes allow the children in this study to feel that educators and peers accept their family. However, they are continuously compared to heterosexual parented families.

Normality greatly impacts the studied family because they are sometimes judged based on the family's structure. However, the parents joke that "one mother is okay, but two is not. It's like double the mother is bad!" Though lesbian parented families are not the majority in society, the studied family is far from abnormal.

The parents suggest considering their family void of gender. They explain themselves as a very busy family that always comes together to enjoy meals, talk, laugh, and occasionally get in arguments. The children are happy in their home, have healthy friendships, and do well in school. The parents are a loving couple that go to work, financially provide for their family, have meaningful friendships, and are a steady and constant loving support to their children. Regardless of the parents' gender, they are "a happy, healthy, and functional family."

If a person were to look at the studied family's overall experiences, they would see that all of the family members are very happy and mentally healthy. Every family member is proud of and loves her family. As the couple discussed family, social, and educational criticism they have received because of their family structure, it was often

brought about because they are not a traditional male and female-parented family. However, the love found in this family is very strong and discrimination is virtually lost on them. Rather than be negatively impacted by societal constraints of a “normal” family, the studied family moves through their lives grateful to have one another and excited to see the day when “homosexuality is not looked upon as unfavorably” as it may currently be. The family is looking forward to a healthy and happy future together.

#### **4.8 Summary of Interpretation of Findings**

This chapter included narratives and specific interview quotes to explain the family’s overall experiences within family, social, and educational systems. The family’s unique experiences were related to current literature about lesbian parented families and their experiences. The purpose of the chapter was to present one family’s experiences as a way to further understand the lives of one lesbian parented family.

The primary finding in this study revealed that all members of the family feel loved and supported, regardless of any discrimination in family, social, or educational systems. Though each system has revealed some instances of negative language or discrimination, each member of the family is proud to be a part of their family unit. Furthermore, the family’s structure has not caused any member of the family to feel ashamed or experience significant psychological distress. Rather, the parents and children report being happy, loved, and proud of their family.

The research data was presented and interpreted by the primary researcher in unbiased fashion. However, human error is possible and to avoid these errors, three interviews were conducted to allow time for follow up questions and explanations. In addition, the researcher organized the information in a systematic fashion and



participated in ongoing critical reflection and journaling about the information. The qualitative research design used in this study must be taken into account when understanding the study's findings.

Possible human error is a weakness of the study's design, but it is also a great strength. Single case studies completed through interviews allow the subjects to explain their lives and experiences in a way that quantitative data cannot. However, it is possible that the researcher misunderstood or misinterpreted the words of the subjects.

Furthermore, the children's experiences within their systems were interpreted through their foster mothers' description and explanation. It is possible that the children's actual feeling and experiences differ from the information provided by the mothers.

Overall, the researcher is aware that the single case study design of this study does not necessarily reflect the experiences of all lesbian parented families. Rather, the research presents one lesbian couple and their children. Remaining open to other family's life experiences, this chapter presents how *these* individuals interact with their family, social, and educational systems. In addition, the chapter makes connections between *this* family's life and the available research. The findings presented in the study may not relate to other lesbian parented families.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this single case study was to investigate one lesbian parent family and their experiences and acceptance into family, social, and educational systems. The conclusions from this study follow the research questions and the findings that address (a) Lesbian parents' experiences in their social, family, and children's educational systems; (b) Lesbian parents' perception of their child's experiences in social, family, and educational systems; and (c) Political, social, or systematic changes for optimal positive experiences in social, family, and educational systems.

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The main finding in this study was that the family reports very positive experiences in their family, social, and educational systems. Though each family member has experienced some discrimination based on their sexual orientation or structure of their family, they speak positively about their family. In the studied family, their family unit is very strong and the parents are able to use rules and structure to show their children love.

The parents in the family report that they love one another and their family very deeply. They have faced some challenges in creating and maintaining their family, but they feel that they have a very functional and happy family. Their greatest suggestion for change is to be a legally recognized couple and family. They believe this will allow them to feel more accepted in society, will give them legal equality to heterosexual couples, and will educate people about lesbian parent families.

The parents believe that when their children entered the family through the foster system it may have caused them to have a greater respect for their foster parents and

siblings. While unsupportive families plagued their early childhood years, they now have the love and support of two parents and siblings. The great contrast between growing up with a difficult childhoods to now living in their foster home may have added to the children's positive willingness to have two mothers.

When the family faces discrimination, negative comments, or social hardships, they are able to protect one another by exhibiting great family pride. The parents reported being very open about their sexual orientation and they believe their daughters are as well. This pride allows them to actively experience life rather than be ashamed of their family. When the daughters hear negative comments about gay or lesbian people, they explain why their family is so great. Being able to articulate how their family functions to others, the girls educate others about lesbian parented families. The more accepting the girls' friends and families are, the more they will have positive interactions in their family, social, and educational systems. With close friends, social activities, and constant family communication, the parents report that all members of the family are happy within the family unit.

The parents reported that their children experience their family, social, and school systems in much the same way as children from heterosexual parented families. While they stand up for their family if it is attacked, the children generally feel accepted by their family, friends, and school. The parents say their children's hope for the future is that people understand that no family should be considered normal. If parents are positive and loving, it can be a good family. The parents reported that their children see their family as "not any different than any other regular family" and believe that regardless of blood, a family is a family.

## **5.2 Researcher Reflections**

When this study was first created, the researcher hoped to improve her understanding of lesbian parented families by understating how the family members experienced certain parts of their lives. In order to investigate certain areas of the family's life, the study included family, social, and educational systems. The researcher thought that by focusing on these three systems, the data would allow for conclusions about their overall life satisfaction. Of particular importance was discrimination in these three systems and any negative experiences the family members may have had.

Prior to selecting participants and collecting data, the researcher considered her personal biases in regard to lesbian parented families. The researcher suspected that the family would have faced some negativity or discrimination in their interactions with family members, friends, and school systems. In addition, the researcher considered the possibility that the children may have at some point in their lives been teased or bullied because of their parents' sexuality. However, the researcher reflected on these preconceived ideas and entered into the research openly.

Following the data collection and compilation of the findings, the researcher recognized that her initial thoughts were incorrect. Though the children had faced minor negativity from peers in school and biological family members, they were able to overcome them because of their strong family structure. The children's ability to disregard discrimination is because of their own individual personalities as well as the supportive leadership of their parents. With constant communication between the parents and children, the parents say their family unit is strong, healthy, and loving.

When the study began, the researcher sought a lesbian parented couple raising children. The selected family's experiences within the foster care system added a very important element to the study. After conducting the parent interviews, the researcher reflected on how their family differs from other types of lesbian parented family. In the researcher's opinion, the children's appreciation and love for their parents may be enhanced because of their early childhood experiences. In each of their biological families, they were not properly cared for, which placed them into the foster care system. Their current family experiences are different than they would have been in their biological families as well as if they had entered the foster home at an earlier age. By interviewing a family with foster children, the researcher was able to study a unique that was unlike any family she had considered prior to gathering data.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the findings, analysis, and conclusions of this study. The recommendations are for: (a) political and legal bodies; (b) social networks and media; (c) educational systems; and (d) recommendations for further research.

**Recommendations for Political and Legal Bodies.** In keeping with the APA, the studied family consists of two loving and supportive parents and three mentally and emotionally healthy children. Regardless of the parents' sexuality, the parents reported that all members feel bonded to and close with their other family members. However, the family experience many challenges because they are not legally recognized as a couple. In Indiana, where the couple resides, gay and lesbian couples are not legally able to marry. Though the couple had a union ceremony, their union is not legally equal to

heterosexual couples. Without a legally binding marriage, the couple will not automatically be parents to their unborn baby. Rather, the non-birthing mother will have to legally adopt the child. In addition, they do not qualify for a family healthcare plan because they are not legally married.

Legal changes, such as the right to marry, would change the lives of lesbian and gay couples because they would have the same benefits within a marriage as heterosexual couples. Improvements would allow both parents to automatically be legal guardians to the children they are parenting together. In addition, the family could be a part of the same healthcare plan and receive its benefits because the couple is married. In the studied family, they said they would participate in a legal marriage if it was offered because they would like the legal benefits of it.

Additionally, legally recognizing same sex relationships would impact other areas of a family's life. For example, if same sex marriage was legal in all states, the parents in the studied family would not have to separate their personal lives from their careers as teachers. If the couple's relationship was legally recognized, there would be no reason to fear losing a job based on their sexual orientation. Furthermore, legal recognition of same sex relationships would spread to other systems, such as social, family, and educational systems. With legal support, many areas of current discrimination would be forced to change their policies and procedures to accommodate gay and lesbian families.

With the support of available lesbian parented family literature, in combination with this research study, there appears to be no reason a same sex parented family should not have equal legal rights to heterosexual couples. The parents provide a loving and supportive home where all three daughters are provided for financially, emotionally, and

physically. Participating in typical family events, the family functions well in their family, social, and educational systems. The parents explained that their family is like any other family except that two women parent it. Legal support of their family would allow them to continue to be a healthy and loving family but it would also add all of the benefits that heterosexual married couples enjoy.

**Recommendations for Social Networks and Media.** Many online social networking sites such as Facebook and websites including YouTube have begun powerful campaigns to support individuality. A recent initiative called the It Gets Better Project is a collection of Internet videos of publically gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people offering their message of encouragement for children without hope (It Gets Better Project, 2010). The videos explain what it was like for the individuals to “come out” to their families and friends and how they overcame childhood teasing or bullying. They also say that while middle school and high school can be very difficult, it will get better. The purpose of the videos is to prevent suicide among LGBT youth and offer hope to children who may be struggling with their sexual orientation.

Public media and celebrities have also been very influential in social acceptance of gay and lesbian individuals, couples, and families. With openly lesbian comedienne, television show hosts, and actresses being public about their sexual orientation, society as a whole is becoming more aware of LGBT issues. As society becomes more aware of the struggles of same sex parented families, social and political changes will be instituted.

In the studied family, they said they are very accepted into their friend and extracurricular activity groups. This acceptance is because they are a part of groups that encourage and celebrate lesbians and same sex parented families. The impact of a

positive social surroundings is great because when a family is around people that support them, they are often happy in their lives. The studied family said they are extremely happy and satisfied in their lives because of the family and friends that love and support their family unit.

To further create a social atmosphere that celebrates all sexual orientations, social media outlets such as Facebook, YouTube, and other websites should continue creating campaigns that support LGBT youth, couples, and families. The more social media messages are available, the greater influence they will have. As children grow up surrounded by affirming and accepting messages, they will be more likely to support LGBT issues such as marriage and family equality. The more messages about individuality, in particular sexuality, are available, the more gay and lesbians and their families will be accepted in society.

**Recommendations for Educational Systems.** The parents in the studied family reported that they and their children have had mostly positive experiences in their current school system. They said that the many teachers have anti bullying posters in their classroom and they do not tolerate any violence among students. However, posters are a passive form of information and school systems could benefit from more active strategies. Educational programs about bullying would be one way for students to learn about the implications of bullying. If a student is a bully, perhaps he or she should attend group counseling, learn about anger management, complete a project with the person they bullied, or attend additional classes about acceptance. Though the needs are different for every student that bullies another student, schools need to implement comprehensive bullying programs. This will greatly help students to be comfortable with themselves and



work with others. While certain teachers have visible messages about bullying, the parents in the study did not mention any educational programs about LGBT individuals and families for the students or the school staff.

Though the parents reported that their daughters' school has many openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, peers sometimes make negative comments about their lesbian daughter's sexuality. Further education for the students about what it means to be gay may help them be more understanding of all students. A recommendation for all school systems is to have diversity training for students that includes information about LGBT students. Assemblies, classes, or lectures that focus on sexual orientation and diversity would allow students to have an open dialogue about what it means to be a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered person. This could further encourage acceptance among students and lessen any teasing, degrading comments, or physical violence.

In addition to the students, staff training about LGBT coworkers, students, and families is imperative. The studied family reported that they feel accepted into their current educational system because they are teachers within their daughters' school system. Therefore, they have not had any negative comments about being a same sex couple parenting children in the school system. Though the couple reports positive interactions with their children's school system, they have personally been impacted because of their sexual orientation in the workplace.

Both parents conceal their personal life when teaching students either because they were blatantly told not to discuss their family or because they choose not to. In Parent 1's case, she was specifically told that she cannot discuss her family with her students. Though they report that they are able to conceal their family when teaching, it

is unfair for them to be targeted because of their sexual orientation. Furthermore, in a previous job Parent 2 felt she was discriminated against because of her sexual orientation. Her supervisor limited her student interactions as a basketball coach and was unsupportive when a student wrote her a threatening message. In both cases, her administration acted on misinformation and stereotypes about her sexual orientation.

The administration of the parents' school could benefit from diversity training to learn how same sex parented families function. Understanding the similarities and differences between heterosexual couples and same sex couples would help the administration be more aware of how to work with LGBT individuals. In the studied family's case, if their administration were more aware of their committed relationship and very functional family, perhaps they would not be forced to conceal their family system.

School administrator and educator training about LGBT issues would also help them learn how to work with LGBT students. Teachers need to be aware of both the struggles and triumphs of LGBT youth in their classrooms. For many teachers, learning more about the LGBT student population will help them to be more sensitive and attuned to their student's needs. In addition, with proper education, the teachers will be better prepared to work with same sex parents with children in the school system.

All teachers, principals, and administrators need further education about gay and lesbian individuals and families. Education will allow school systems to understand how same sex parented homes work and hopefully see that no family is normal. Rather, every family has unique characteristics and personalities that require special attention.

Hopefully, further education will educate children who will grow up to make further political and systematic changes supporting all people.

**Recommendations for Further Research.** This research study concentrated on the parents' experiences in family, social, and educational systems as well as their perception of their children's experiences in the same systems. The lack of published research about lesbian parented families in conjunction with this study's conclusions, calls for additional research about lesbian parented families. Specifically, research focusing on foster children placed in lesbian parented homes and their experiences in family, social, and educational systems would add to available literature.

In the studied family, the children entered their foster home as teenagers, which offers a unique family perspective. Not only did the children enter a lesbian parented home in their teenage years, but they also are children in the foster system. While some studies might hypothesize that the children would have difficulty adjusting and fitting into the family, the parents reported that they feel appreciated and loved by their daughters. Additional research might focus on foster children who enter lesbian parented families at a much younger age.

Qualitative case studies, that include narratives and detailed descriptions about foster children's experiences in lesbian parented families, would provide information that is currently absent from other research studies. By conducting interviews and compiling the information into a case study, the results would offer valuable information that may support the conclusions found in this study. The more data that is available about lesbian parented families and each member of the family's experiences, the more support there is for gay and lesbian social and political equality.

The conclusions formulated from this single case study design could be enhanced with additional quantitative research. Research focusing on many foster children placed in lesbian parented homes would provide a much larger sample of numeric data. While the completed case study offered rich and detailed data about one family's experiences, gathering data from many families may offer information reflective of many lesbian parented homes.

For the purposes of the completed research project, data was gathered by interviewing the parents. Though the researcher observed parent and children interactions in the home, the children were not directly interviewed. This was a limitation of the study because the conclusions centered on the parent's experiences and their interpretation of their children's experiences. Interviews with the children would allow the study to make conclusions about the children's experiences directly based on the data they provided. With child data collection, the research could focus on the children's relationship with the parents, their mental health, and overall happiness. In future research projects, both the children and the parents could be interviewed for a better understanding of the entire family.

In addition to research about foster children placed in lesbian parented homes, there is a great need for research about lesbian parented families in general. For the completed study, the qualifications to be a research participant included being a lesbian parent couple raising one or more children. This meant that children could have entered the family via adoption, foster care, a sperm donor, or a previous heterosexual relationship. The participants' children entered the family through the foster system and their unborn baby was conceived using a sperm donor. Possible research might focus on

children who are raised by lesbian parents since infancy. Learning how children experience their family throughout life would add to lesbian parent literature.

A longitudinal study about children of lesbian parents would also supplement the available research. Following a lesbian parent family for multiple years in the children's life would present details that the completed study did not offer. Though the parents reported that they and their children are happy within their family, social, and educational systems, it would be interesting to interview them in throughout the next twenty years of their lives. The longitudinal study would offer a more complete view of the family because it would provide data from many different times in the family's life.

Overall, there are few studies about children of lesbian parents and additional research is needed. Research may include qualitative, quantitative, or longitudinal designs and focus on the children, parents, or entire family. Following this research study, there is a need to further investigate foster children in lesbian parent families as well as the children's direct thoughts about their family. The more information that is available about lesbian parent families, the more socially acceptable and understood these families will be.

#### **5.4 Implications for Counselors**

The data and results of this research study have particular application to the counseling profession. The research participants explained how they and their children experience family, social, and educational systems in their present life. Currently, the parents report that they and their children some minimal discrimination in the three systems, though they are able to overcome it. When discussing negative reactions to their sexual orientation and family structure, the parents said that certain members of their

biological families are unsupportive. While the studied family was able to disregard their extended family's negativity, counselors need to be aware of the tremendous impact of hurtful comments from family members.

Available literature and results from this study show that parents receive great personal satisfaction from parenting children. Though extended family members have said hurtful comments about the family, they were able to overcome them. In families without the level of resilience as the studied family, helping professions may need to provide counseling and support to lesbian parents and their families. Counselors would need to understand the psychological effects of degrading comments from family members and how they can help their client deal with them.

The study also offers counselors the unique perspective of children who enter a lesbian parented home through the foster system. The parents reported emotional and psychological issues their children have faced, particularly stemming from their biological parents, because they were placed in a lesbian parented family. Offering details about how the parents believe their children have handled their same sex parented foster home, the study provides narratives that could help counselors understand the children's experiences in the family.

Counselors should also be aware of the legal injustices of state governments, adoption agencies, and the foster system when working with same sex parented families. The studied family said they believe they were discriminated against in the foster system and had to wait many months before having a child placed in their home. In addition, the parents said that adoption would be very difficult for them because many agencies favor traditional heterosexual couples over same sex couples. The parents reported that they

are very happy in their decision to be foster parents, however, other families might exhibit negative emotional or mental health because of their treatment in these legal agencies.

In addition, counselors can use this study to further expand their understanding of the lesbian parent family phenomenon. Each family narrative offers unique experiences that would benefit a counselor's perception of diversity in families. From this research, counseling professionals will gain additional information about how the children entered the family as well as their life experiences. The study might show the importance of positive communication between parents and children and how that has improved the studied family's relationships with one another. Furthermore, counselors can use this study to be advocates for their same sex couples who desire to or are actively raising children.

As helping professionals, counselors also serve as client advocates. Especially within the adoption and foster care system, same sex couples may face discrimination and other tribulations that impede on their ability to become parents. It is important for counselors to understand the unique experiences of lesbian parents so work in favor of the clients' needs when necessary. This study offers insight into one lesbian parent family and areas of their life when an advocate could have assisted their family. For example, when working with the foster care system, the family may have benefited from a counselor advocating for them to be parents. As lesbian parents and their families live their lives, they may rely on a counselor's services for many different reasons. The more a counselor knows about issues pertaining to lesbian parent families, the more they can advocate for the clients' needs.

## References

- Adams, J.L., Jaques, J.D., & May, K.M. (2004). Counseling gay and lesbian families: theoretical considerations. *The Family Journal*, 12(40), 40-42.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2005). Support of legal recognition of same-sex civil marriage position statement. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from <http://www.psych.org/Departments/EDU/Library/APAOfficialDocumentsandRelated/PositionStatements/200502.aspx>
- American Psychological Association Council of Representatives. (2004, July 28). *Apa policy statement:sexual orientation, parents, and children*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/about/governance/council/policy/parenting.aspx>
- American Psychological Association Council of Representatives. (2004, July). Resolution on sexual orientation and marriage. Retrieved April 29, 2011, from <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/task-force/military-deployment.pdf>
- Barbaro, M., & Confessore, N. (2011, June 24). New York Allows Same-Sex Marriage, Becoming Largest State to Pass Law. *The New York Times*, (New York, NY), p. A1.
- Berrios, \$., & Lucca, N. (2006). Qualitative methodology in counseling research: Recent contributions and challenges for a new century. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 84, 174-186.
- Birkey, A. (2011, September 8). *Family research council launches anti-gay marriage ads in north carolina*. Retrieved from <http://washingtonindependent.com/111394/family-research-council-launches-anti-gay-marriage-ads-in-north-carolina>



- Bos, H., & Gartrell, N. (2010). Adolescents of the USA National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study: Can Family Characteristics Counteract the Negative Effects of Stigmatization?. *Family Process*, 49(4): 559-572.
- Bos, H., & Van Balen, F. (2008). Children in planned lesbian families: Stigmatization, psychological adjustment and protective factors. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 10, 221-236.
- Carr, W. L. and Kemmis, S. (1986). *Becoming Critical. Education, knowledge and action research*, London: Falmer.
- Dailey, T. J. (2011). *The Slippery Slope of Same-Sex Marriage*. Retrieved from <http://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=bc04c02>.
- Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Oishi S. (2002). Subjective well being: The science of happiness and life satisfaction. In C.R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez, *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 63-73). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Enomoto, E. K., & Bair, M. A. (1999). "The Role of the School in the Assimilation of Immigrant Children: A Case Study of Arab Americans." *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 1 45-66.
- Enomoto, E. K., & Bair, M. A. (2002). Case study. In S. B. Merriam (Ed.), *Qualitative Research in Practice* (pp. 178-200). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fairtlough, A. (2008). Growing up with a lesbian or gay parent: young people's perspectives. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 16(5), 521-528.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (1994). Interviewing" The art of science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of qualitative research* (p. 361- 376). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.

- Fontana , A. and J. Frey (2003). The Interview: From Structured Questions to Negotiated Text. Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln London, Sage.
- Garvin, D. A. (2003, September-October). Making the case: Professional education for the world of practice. *Harvard Magazine*, 106(1), 56-107.
- Gilgun, J. F. (1994). A case for case studies in social work research. *Social Work*, 39, 371-380.
- Green, R. J. (2004). Risk and resilience in lesbian and gay couples: Comment on Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18(2), 290-292.
- Hagner, D. (2010). The Role of Naturalistic Assessment in Vocational Rehabilitation. *Journal of Rehabilitation* 76(1), 28-34.
- Hagner, D., & Helm, D. (1994). Qualitative methods in rehabilitation research. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 27, 290-303.
- Hanley-Maxwell, C., Al Hano, I., & Skivington, M. (2007). Qualitative Research in Rehabilitation Counseling. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 50(2), 99-110.
- Hebert, T. P., Beardsley, T. M. (2001). "Jermaine" A Critical Case Study of a Gifted Black Child Living in Rural Poverty." *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 45(2), 85-103.
- Holstein, J. A. , & Gubrium, J. F. . (2003). Active interviewing. In J.A. Holstein (Ed.), *Postmodern Interviewing* (pp. 67-79). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Irvine, J. (2005). Anti-gay politics online: A study of sexuality and stigma on national websites. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy: Journal of National Sexuality Resource Center*, 2(1), 3-22.

- Kant, I. (1781/2003). Critique of Pure Reason
- Lev, A.I. (2010). How Queer!- The Development of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in LGBTQ-Headed Families. *Family Process*, 49(3), 268-290.
- McGloin, S. (2008). The trustworthiness of case study methodology. *Nurse Researcher*, 16(1), 45-55.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). Designing Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication.
- Mazeland, H, P. ten Have (1996). *Essential tensions in (semi)open research interviews*. In: I. Maso, F. Wester, eds. *The deliberate dialogue: qualitative perspectives on the interview*. Brussels: VUB University Press: 87-113 [also: <http://www.pscw.uva.nl/emca/et.htm>]
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patterson, C.J. (2009). Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents; Psychology, Law, and Policy. *American Psychologist*, 727-736.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perrin, E. C. (2002). Technical Report: Coparent or Second-Parent Adoption by Same Sex Parents. *Pediatrics*, 109(2): 341-344.

- Ponterotto, J. G. (2006). Brief Note on the Origins, Evolution, and Meaning of the Qualitative Research Concept "Thick Description." *The Qualitative Reporter*, 11(3): 538-549.
- Rimalower, L., & Caty, C. (2009). The mamas and the papas: the invisible diversity of families with same-sex parents in the United States. *Sex Education*, 9(1): 17-32.
- Rohner, R. P. (1990). Acceptance and rejection. In D. Livinson, J. Ponzetti, & P. F. Jorgenson, *Encyclopedia of human emotions*, 1, 6-14. New York: Macmillan.
- Ross, L., Epstein, R., Goldfinger, C., Steele, L., Anderson, S., Strike, C. (2008). Lesbian and queer mothers navigating the adoption system: the impacts on mental health. *Health Sociology Review*, 17(3), 254-266.
- Rubin, H. J. , & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: the art of hearing data*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Ryan, S .D. , Pearlmutter, S., & Groza, V. (2004). Coming out of the closet: opening agencies to gay and lesbian adoptive parents. *Social Work*, 49(1), 85-95.
- Seidman, I. E. (1991). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 435-454). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Stake, R.E. (2003). Case studies. In N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln (Ed.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 134-164). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Stake, R.E. (2010). *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work* (pp. 123-126). NY: The Guilford Press.

- Szymanski, E. M. (1993). Research design and statistical design. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 36(4), 178-182.
- Valsiner, J. (2000). Data as representations: Contextualizing quantitative and qualitative research strategies. *Social Science Information*, 39, 99-113).
- Wainright, J. L., Russell, S. T., & Patterson, C. J. (2004). Psychosocial adjustment, school outcomes, and romantic relationships of adolescents with same-sex parents. *Child Development*, 75(6), 1886-1898.
- Wainright, J. L., & Patterson, C. J. (2006). Delinquency, Victimization, and Substance Use Among Adolescents with Female Same-Sex Parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 20(3), 526-530.
- Weber, S. (2008). Parenting, Family Life, and Well-Being Among Sexual Minorities: Nursing Police and Practice Implications. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing*, 29, 601-618.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 1-16. Sage Publications: Los Angeles, California.
- What is the it gets better project*. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>.
- Willis, J. W. (2007). *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive and Critical Approaches*. 6-7, 238-287. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 1-190. Sage Publications: Los Angeles, California.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 57-82. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, California.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A: Informed Consent**

# **DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY**

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

## **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**TITLE:** A Lesbian Parented Family's Acceptance and Experiences in Family, Social, and Educational Systems

**INVESTIGATOR:** Dr. David Delmonico  
110 C Canevin Hall  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
(412) 396- 4032

Sarah Dalton, student researcher  
600 Forbes Ave., Department of Residence Life  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, PA 15282  
(570) 439-4771  
daltons@duq.edu

**ADVISOR: (if applicable:)** Dr. David Delmonico  
110 C Canevin Hall  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
(412) 396- 4032  
delmonico@duq.edu

**SOURCE OF SUPPORT:**

This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Science in Education degree at Duquesne University.

**PURPOSE:**

You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate how lesbian parents perceive their child's experiences and acceptance into family, social, and educational systems. This study will address how disclosing lesbian parented family structure to family members, friends of the parents and children, and members of the school system affects the parent and the parent's perception of their child's experiences in their family, social, and educational system. The definition of disclosure will include sharing the family's structure with others, being honest about lesbian sexuality and parenthood, and the perceived children's openness about their parents' sexuality.

You are being asked to allow me to interview you, a lesbian parent couple, for three, two hour sessions that will give significant insight into your family's acceptance in social, family, and educational systems. All of the data gathered will be videotaped, transcribed, and compiled into a qualitative family case study.

The study will help contribute to counselor's understanding of the many facets of lesbian couples who are also primary caregivers to children. This understanding has many applications in social and political arenas as gay couples are striving to gain equality on a variety of fronts. The data gathered will help tell the story and reveal the perceptions of one gay couple who are actively parenting children.

**YOUR PARTICIPATION:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study about lesbian parents' perception of their family's experiences in family, social, and educational systems. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a parent in a couple that has at least one child, which you are raising since birth, and you identify your sexual orientation as lesbian.

Your involvement in the study will last for three, two hour interviews to be completed on three separate occasions. The sessions will be video recorded and identifying information will be removed when transcribed.

You will be asked to complete a preliminary family structure questionnaire at the beginning of the first interview. The first interview will review your family structure based on the answers you provided on the questionnaire.

The second session will be a semi-structured interview that will ask general questions about your family structure, experiences with family, social, and educational systems, discrimination and social hardship, and your family's psychological health. In addition, the student researcher will allow you to offer information you believe valuable to understanding lesbian parenthood and families. By investigating the experiences of your family, the information may be representative of other lesbian families.

The third interview will focus on your interpretations of what was discussed during the first two sessions. The researchers will document key themes noticed in the first two sessions and ask you to reflect on them. For example, if it was noted that the child has experiences of discrimination in school, how has that affected your family? How has the discrimination impacted you as a parent? All of the questions will be follow-up questions to information presented by you.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

The risks of participating in this study may include personal discomfort or embarrassment in revealing information of a sensitive nature about family structure, experiences, or personal sexual orientation. However, the information obtained through the interviews is transcribed void of personal identifiers to protect the confidentiality of the information presented in the interview. If the interviewee experiences discomfort or embarrassment, they have the option to terminate their participation in the study. In the event that the interviewee decides to leave the study, she will not be treated differently in the PFLAG meetings. The student and primary researcher are not participants in the PFLAG meetings and would show no bias or discrimination if the interviewee decides to terminate their participation.



There will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in this study. This research may help to better understand lesbian family structure, lesbian-parented homes, and how children experience their life with lesbian parents. Additionally, the information you offer may help educate school systems, counselors, and other helping professionals to better work with and advocate for lesbian parent families.

**COMPENSATION:**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study. However, participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:**

All of the data obtained through the interview process will be transcribed by the student researcher and will not include identifying information. Data that includes identifiers such as names, description of an individual, or identifying locations will be removed when transcribed into the written interview transcript. Identifiable data about the subject or anyone the subject refers to will be removed to protect the confidentiality of subject data. The original video recordings will continue to have identifying information, but the video recordings are only accessible to the primary researcher, Dr. David Delmonico, and the co-researcher, Sarah Dalton. The videos will be kept in a locked office to which only the researchers have access. The video recordings will be destroyed five years after completion of the study.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data already collected will not be used for the research.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:**

A copy of the completed results of this study will be made available to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may call Dr. Joseph Kush, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (412)-396-1151.

In addition, if you should have any questions, you may call the student researcher, Sarah E. Dalton at (570) 439-4771 or email her at daltons@duq.edu or the primary researcher, Dr. David Delmonico at (412) 396-4032

**SIGNATURES:**

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date

---

Researcher's Signature

---

Date

## **Appendix B: Pre-Interview Family Structure Questionnaire**

Note: These questions were asked to and discussed by the participants at the beginning of interview session one. The participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on the provided answers.

### **Partnership Questions**

1. Parent 1:
  - a. Name
  - b. Age
  - c. Occupation
2. Parent 2:
  - a. Name
  - b. Age
  - c. Occupation
3. How many months/years have you been together?
4. Have you been legally married/ taken part in a civil union that may or may not be recognized in your state of residence?
5. Do you have children from previous relationships?
6. At what point in your relationship did the two of you want children together?
7. How long had you been a couple when you had your child/children?
8. How old were you when you had your child/children?
9. How did you and your partner have your child/children (i.e. adoption, sperm donor, etc)?

10. What are the legal parameters of your family structure? (i.e. did you adopt the child together, did the second parent legally adopt the child, co-parent relationship without legal custody, etc.)
11. Did you experience challenges having a child? If yes, what sorts of challenges?
12. Does your child interact with his or her biological father in any way? If yes, how much and what type of interaction?
13. What social or religious groups do you belong to or participate in as a family? (i.e. church memberships, LGBTQ support group, family weekend activity group, etc.)

#### Questions about the Child/ Children

1. How many children do you have?
2. How old are each of the children?
3. What grade are the children in?
4. What are some of the child/children's favorite activities (i.e. playing outside, watching television, interacting with friends, etc.)?
5. What subjects do the child/children excel at in school?
6. How many close friends do you believe your child/children has?
7. What activities do you like to do together as a family?
8. How emotionally connected do you feel to your child?

## **Appendix C: Session Two Interview Questions**

Note: The following questions were intended to be a semi-structured interview outline for interview two. This outline is intended for the researchers to structure the interview and the questions will not be presented to the participants prior to interview two.

1. From your point of view, how does your child experience his or her family?
2. From your point of view, how does your child interact with his or her peer group?
3. From your point of view, how does your child experience the school system he or she is enrolled in?
4. As the parent, how do you interact with your nuclear and extended family?
5. As the parent, how do you interact with your own friends and your child's friends?
6. As the parent, how do you experience your child's school system?
7. How accepted do you believe your child is in his or her family?
8. How accepted do you believe your child is with his or her friends?
9. How accepted do you believe your child is in his or her school?
10. As the parent, how accepted do you feel in your nuclear and extended family?
11. As the parent, how accepted do you feel within your group of friends?
12. As the parent, how accepted do you feel by your child's school system?
13. Do you believe your child has experienced any discrimination or lack of acceptance into your family, his or her peer group, or school?
14. Have you, as the parent, experienced any discrimination or lack of acceptance into your family, peer group, or your child's school?
15. Do you believe your psychological health has been impacted because of your family structure?
16. Do you believe your child's psychological health has been impacted because of your family structure?